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William Morris,
aet 23.

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM MORRIS

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
HIS DAUGHTER MAY MORRIS

VOLUME XXIV
SCENES FROM THE FALL OF TROY
AND OTHER POEMS
AND
FRAGMENTS

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ILLUSTRATIONS
Portrait of William Morris aged 23, from a photograph Frontispiece
Reduced facsimile of a page from the Kelmscott Press Chaucer, page 58 to face page xiii

INTRODUCTION

IN THIS volume I have included, contrary to the usual practice, a reduced facsimile of a page from the Kelmscott Press Chaucer; it was felt that the series of illustrations could scarcely be considered complete without a specimen from this stately work, the climax of modern fine printing and decoration, inadequate and unsatisfying as a reduced plate must always be. To all who know the Chaucer it will appear like a page seen through the wrong end of a field-glass; however, no reduction of a decorated page from this press has ever looked so well, for it is printed on the Kelmscott Press paper, so that the richness of line, even on this small scale, is not lost. I have chosen of set purpose the opening of the Prioress's Tale: we have seen the subject before, painted on the wardrobe that stood, first in my mother's bedroom at Red House, and later at the end of the long drawing-room at Kelmscott House. (You get a glimpse of it there in the plate in Volume XXIII.) Nothing could be more interesting than to see with what other hand, in what other atmosphere, the artist tells this story, once at the beginning, and once more near the close of life. Before this likeness and unlikeness those who loved the man and reverence his work may well be seized with a sudden emotion, a sudden pictorial realization as it were, of all that has gone between, of what hand and eye and heart have retained, what thrown off as unnecessary equipment for the long journey.

Not that all this stands expressed in the lovely and tender drawing of little Hugh of Lincoln at his prayer and his fellows at their school, but the early panel and the late drawing (with the picture that followed it) thus considered together, set the mind wandering on this path, set one also speculating as to what a man keeps of his old self on the life-long journey, and what the loss and the gain of it all may be.

Who will ever learn from the voiceless and solitary being enshrined in each human creature all the care and misgiving, the anguish even, that goes to the production of some trium-

phant success in the life of an artist? We see the achievement, he hears our praise; our welcome of the work, our delight in it, must give some satisfaction: but in truth the real satisfaction, the pride in work is a deeper and more lonely emotion than any that could be aroused by praise from without; its roots strike deep in that mysterious and fated dedication of self to the beloved object—the instinct for toil that makes beauty and order out of the apparent chancehap of human existence—in which every energy is strained and round which spring up a hundred fears and doubts, to be fought down and conquered and, starting afresh in another form, to be again reconquered till out of the dust of battle comes victory. And the victory is all we see—the finished work, serene and fresh.

People always say that my father was one of the happiest of men in his work: but who can know for sure? The long silent nights of writing must represent some struggle in the depths —not all pure enjoyment—the labour out of which the work comes to light. In other forms of the artist's work the struggles and the pleasure of overcoming them are tangible enough; but his difficulties and moments of despondency and self-doubt are rarely, if ever, voiced, and truly the worker is lonely to the end. "I have been working hard at the Chaucer to-day," he writes to Jenny in the Spring of 1894, "and am now in the anxious stage about it." A word now and again like this is the nearest we get to the uncertainties and fears of the birth-pangs of a masterpiece.

When I had received my copy of the Kelmscott Press Chaucer, and in thanking him tried to express (oh how clumsily and shamefacedly out of sheer excitement) something of the wonder and pleasure of it—of everything, the look of profound melancholy that (perhaps unconsciously) he turned on me in smiling tenderly seemed like a glimpse into a very far country. What it quite meant I don't think I realized at the time, though it moved me deeply: all was made clear not long afterwards . . . it was the look of an intensely lonely man—never to be forgotten while memory

serves. Early or late the knowledge of this isolation comes to all: he was still young when he wrote

> When at the last we know
> That God has made each one of us as lone
> As he himself sits . . .

and nearing the end when he spoke of

> . . . that wall of distance, that round each one doth grow,
> And maketh it hard and bitter each other's thought to know.

THE great book, mention of which has led me into questionings by the way that will never find an answer, began to occupy my father's mind in 1891. His determination to produce the works of Chaucer in a black letter type began to take form then, but he knew that the whole thing depended on his being able to get Burne-Jones to make the drawings. It will be seen that the latter got thoroughly interested in the undertaking and that the first swift sketches he did were so cleverly translated for the wood-engraver * that he felt moved to produce even more drawings than had been allowed for at the first, to my father's great satisfaction.

Mr. S. C. Cockerell's account of the Kelmscott Press † will be in the hands of all who are specially concerned with fine printing, but the general interest taken in the productions of the Kelmscott Press induces me to make use of some passages from it. Speaking of the Chaucer he says:

"As far back as June 11, 1891, Mr. Morris spoke of printing a Chaucer with a black letter fount which he hoped

* After a few drawings had been so translated by Mr. Catterson Smith, Burne-Jones declared that he could use him "like a tool in his hand."

† A Note . . . by William Morris together with a short Description of the Press by S. C. Cockerell. The volume contains a list of the books printed at the Kelmscott Press and important notes on the books themselves.

to design.... [After several trials] in July, 1892, another trial page, a passage from The Knight's Tale in double columns of 58 lines, was got out, and found to be satisfactory. The idea of the Chaucer as it now exists, with illustrations by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, then took definite shape....

"The [Kelmscott Press] list for December 1, 1894, which is the first containing full particulars, announces that all paper copies are sold.

"Mr. Morris began designing his first folio border on Feb. 1, 1893, but was dissatisfied with the design and did not finish it. Three days later he began the vine border for the first page, and finished it in about a week, together with the initial word 'Whan,' the two lines of heading, and the frame for the first picture, and Mr. Hooper engraved the whole of these on one block. The first picture was engraved at about the same time. A specimen of the first page (differing slightly from the same page as it appears in the book) was shown at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in October and November, 1893, and was issued to a few leading booksellers, but it was not until August 8, 1894, that the first sheet was printed at 14, Upper Mall... On June 2 [1896] the first two copies were delivered to Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Mr. Morris. Mr. Morris's copy is now at Exeter College, Oxford, with other books printed at the Kelmscott Press."

The second volume of the Earthly Paradise was the last book published at the Press in my father's lifetime.

Was it chance or sentiment that made the master-printer adopt as a watermark on the paper made for the most splendid and most loved of his productions a Perch with a branch in its mouth? It is thus linked on to places and times that stood for all that he enjoyed of open-air tranquillity—a hieroglyph of the Manor-garden and the river-side and their delights. The craftsman or the merchant has always pleased himself by introducing into his working-hours some sentiment or record out of his intimate life, a badge taken from an innocent sym-

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE PRIORESSES TALE

THER WAS IN ASYE, IN A GREET CITEE,
Amonges cristene folk, a Jewerye,
Sustened by a lord of that contree
for foule usure, and lucre of vileynye,
Hateful to Crist and to his compaignye;
And thurgh the strete men myghte ride or wende,
for it was free, and open at eyther ende.

A litel scole of cristen folk ther stood
Doun at the ferther ende, in which ther were
Children an heepe, ycomen of cristen blood,
That lerned in that scole yeer by yere
Swich manere doctrine as men used there,
This is to seyn, to syngen and to rede,
As smale children doon in hire childhede.

AMONG thise children was a wydwes sone,
A litel clergeon, seven yeer of age,
That day by day to scole was his wone,
And eek also, whereas he saugh thymage
Of Cristes mooder, hadde he in usage,
As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye
His Ave Marie, as he goth by the weye.

Thus hath this wydwe hir litel sone ytaught
Oure blisful lady, Cristes mooder deere,
To worshipe ay, and he forgate it naught,
for sely child wol alday soone leere;
But ay, whan I remembre on this mateere,
Seint Nicholas stant evere in my presence,
for he so yong to Crist dide reverence.

This litel child, his litel book lernynge,
As he sat in the scole at his prymer,

Reduced page from the Kelmscott Chaucer

bolism to which only a small group can have a clue: so among my father's old friends some, in turning over the leaves of the different books of the Press, may smile at pleasant memories called up by the watermarks upon the paper: the Primrose, the Perch, the Apple : Spring, Summer, Autumn —each well-loved season brought its joys in orchard and river-meadow, sights and sounds and perfume not to be entirely put out of memory amid the anxieties of London life.

DURING all the years of the Kelmscott Press, the family, when away from Hammersmith, were kept posted up in the progress of the more important books. The following extract from a letter to Mother in Italy at the end of 1892 gives a good though familiar idea of the doings of the Press: "I cannot write a due letter standing up in Mr. Reeves' shop so I will only add that Jenny and I are both quite well and cheerful; that the Kelmscott Press is humming, and that Mr. Q. has duly paid his first half of the Recuyells, so that if Mr. Petulengro met me he would know by the look of me that I had money in my pocket."

Later he writes to her: "I have been working desperately at the Chaucer ornaments the last few days; and there will be a pile of work in them—but they look *well*—though I say it as shouldn't." And a few days later he reports, "I am getting on with the Chaucer ornaments and shall utterly finish that for the first page this morning. My eyes! how good it is! Meantime Shakespeare is out (yesterday) and Reeves has already sold over 300. Also Order of Chivalry is all but ready.... The Interminable is rather hung up amidst all this border drawing: but I shall finish it all right soon."

The Interminable was the nickname for The Well at the World's End.

Another general report reaches Mother a week or two later: "The Order of Chivalry and the News from N[owhere] are on the point of coming out; the Wolsey and the Godfrey

are nearly done. I should tell you that I am beginning translating the Beowulf and like it very much. Again I should tell you that the Shakespeare is all sold; 500 copies it was; less 30 copies which I keep. This looks healthy . . . Now this is a bad letter . . . I *can't* write a good letter. So please accept the will for the deed my dear."

In the summer of next year the Chaucer is mentioned in a characteristic letter to Jenny, from which I take the following. They had parted at Kelmscott and he tells her how he came up in the train with Lord Dillon "who can't help being a lord and is otherwise a good antiquarian and an agreeable man, so we talked all the way . . . . They are finishing title to the Book of Wisdom and Lies . . . . printing the Chaucer very well. Item it is all sold except 3 vellum copies and people are quarrelling over the privilege of buying it." A few weeks later he tells her that "Chaucer is humming," and so it goes, overseeing the new productions, designing new borders and letters, writing romances in leisure-time, and buying rare printed books and matchless manuscripts; and away to Kelmscott for a few days whenever he can spare the time.

The inexhaustible interest of it all! The satisfaction of printing old favourites richly and beautifully, the pleasure of looking forward to further projects! Earlier in the printing days Mr. Cockerell notes in his diary: "He has thoughts of printing Scott's novels, as well as Chaucer and the Bible, after he has completed the Golden Legend and all his own books." I will quote the conclusion of Mr. Cockerell's description of the Press:

"Other works announced in the lists as in preparation, but afterwards abandoned, were The Tragedies, Histories, and Comedies of William Shakespeare; Caxton's Vitas Patrum; The Poems of Theodore Watts-Dunton; and A Catalogue of the Collection of Woodcut Books, Early Printed Books, and Manuscripts at Kelmscott House. The text of the Shakespeare was to have been prepared by Dr. Furnivall. The original intention, as first set out in the list of May 20, 1893, was to print it in three vols. folio. A trial

page from Macbeth, printed at this time, is in existence. The same information is repeated until the list of July 2, 1895, in which the book is announced as to be a 'small 4to. (special size),' i.e., the size afterwards adopted for The Earthly Paradise. It was not, however, begun, nor was the volume of Mr. Watts-Dunton's poems. Of the Vitas Patrum, which was to have been uniform with The Golden Legend, a prospectus and specimen page were issued in March, 1894, but the number of subscribers did not justify its going beyond this stage. Two trial pages of the Catalogue were set up; some of the material prepared for it has now appeared in 'Some German Woodcuts of the Fifteenth Century.' In addition to these books, The Hill of Venus was in preparation. Among works that Mr. Morris had some thought of printing may also be mentioned The Bible, Gesta Romanorum, Malory's Morte Darthur, The High History of the San Graal (translated by Dr. Sebastian Evans), Piers Ploughman, Huon of Bordeaux, Caxton's Jason, a Latin Psalter, The Prymer or Lay Folk's Prayer-Book, Some Mediaeval English Songs and Music, The Pilgrim's Progress, and a book of Romantic Ballads. He was engaged on the selection of the Ballads, which he spoke of as the finest poems in our language, during his last illness."

IN the summer of 1890 my father bought a copy of the Golden Legend printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1527, and he soon afterwards determined to print it himself. Thus in starting the Kelmscott Press he started buying early printed books "to serve as models" for his own productions; in his ledger he charges one or two of them to the Press as one of the expenses. And so the library of the later years came into being and so it grew, till it came to pass that before the end, when a splendid manuscript was in the market and exactly after his own heart he could not rest until he had made it his own indeed, at almost any price. In younger days he had

acquired a few early-printed books and manuscripts, though he never paid very much for them (the whole scale of prices has of course altered enormously), but these were mostly sold later on, when the cares of a house and of business were upon him, and thereafter, until the formation of the Press, he never spent a great deal on his library, buying principally books that he looked upon as "tools" for work. Two famous volumes which were early friends he always regretted having parted with: one the "Schatzbehalter" from the press of Anton Koberger of Nuremberg, whose great woodcuts formed one of our Sunday recreations in the long drawing-room at Queen Square; the other was Boccaccio's "De Claris Mulieribus" printed at Ulm by Johann Zainer 1473 —the Yellow Book he and Burne-Jones called it, from the colour of its vellum binding. My father got both these books again later, the "Schatzbehalter" a far finer copy than the old one. In his article on the German Woodcut books of the Fifteenth Century, he speaks of the Ulm Boccaccio as "a very old friend of mine, and perhaps the first book that gave me a clear insight into the essential qualities of the mediaeval design of that period."

"Amongst the early printed German books without woodcuts," says Mr. S. C. Cockerell, "he had ten from the press of Günther Zainer of Augsburg and five from that of his contemporary Schüssler. From the early Cologne presses there were nineteen volumes, seven productions of the famous press of Peter Schöffer of Mainz, including a fine copy of the "Constitutiones" of Clement V on vellum. The Nuremberg presses of Koberger and Sensenschmid were also very well represented by nineteen volumes. From the Strassburg presses there were eleven examples by Mentelin, seven by Eggestein, five by the R printer and volumes from many other of the presses of that city. There were also seven volumes printed by Johann Zainer at Ulm; the presses of Basel, Blaubeuren, Esslingen, Lauingen, Reutlingen, Rostock, Speier and Würzburg were also well represented."

The Foreword to the "German Woodcut Books of the

Fifteenth Century" issued in 1898 by the Kelmscott Press records that twenty-nine of the reproductions are all that were done of a series chosen by my father to appear in the Catalogue of his library, which was to have been printed at the Press with notes by himself.* In turning over the leaves, you will get an idea of the quality of the collection: there is a page to remind one of the delightful Aesop from Augsburg, and there the favourite "Spiegel der menschlichen Behaltnis," "one of the most amusing of woodcut books" says the owner of it. And there is a "Legenda Aurea" of Günther Zainer, and there is "Das Buch der Weisheit" and many other popular reading-books of the fifteenth century. Of other countries, he had many lovely Paris woodcut books, the ever favourite "Mer des Hystoires" (Pierre le Rouge), Boccaccio's "Louenge et Vertu des nobles et cleres Dames," his "Genealogie des Dieux," "Tristan Chevalier de la Table Ronde," "Merlin," "La Destruction de Troye le grant"—the mere list of names calls up the chivaleresque pageant of the fifteenth century, and each one of them in its elegance and variety—the French tradition of grace and flexibility—fulfils the promise of the title, a thing to linger over with caressing hand and eye. Among the finest of the French books were the "Cité de Dieu" and the "Neuf Preux," both printed at Abbeville. Italy, Spain and the Netherlands were also splendidly represented in the library.

AS I sit here in the old house by the river, turning over many matters and listening to the distant rumours of War, I can scarcely think without emotion of the exquisite pleasure my father got from his manuscripts in those last years of declining strength, and how wisely and nobly he spent the proceeds of his toil. It was a great passion, not exactly the collector's passion—not that of the wealthy collector, at least: peculiarity or "mere" rarity, or quantity,

* From Mr. Cockerell's Diary for 1892: Mon. May 21. W.M. began the notes for the Catalogue.

did not appeal to him; each book above a certain level of general excellence had its own individual quality and filled him with an eager delight that those can understand who have themselves been under the spell of Mediaeval Art. He loved his books as a craftsman, as a poet, as a romancist: with a threefold affection and a threefold pleasure. A man's taste in collecting is apt to be detached from his life-interests and his work, nay, is welcomed because it is so detached, but here the passion was the outcome of personal experience, a blossoming of some of the enthusiasms of life. The understanding of technique and the keen realization of the times which produced these manuscripts and printed books enabled my father to enjoy them in a specially intimate manner. Opening one of his possessions and turning the vellum leaves was to him like walking from window to window and looking out on animated scenes familiar in a strange way—scenes that start out of a past to which he had once belonged.

To the collector who is not a man of great wealth employing agents North and South, and East and West, each piece of his treasured store has its tale of personal effort and anxiety, and the "pride of possession" is here a legitimate and healthy feeling. There is always a possibility of romance too, or at least an element of surprise, about any kind of collecting, and the library at Kelmscott House had some stories of its own. I can always remember a few thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscripts there—books that one was allowed to look at with due care and reverence—without, unfortunately, remembering names; but almost all the finest were bought within the last six years, when, as aforesaid, he seriously began collecting. Though he had not a very large library of manuscripts—rather more than a hundred—yet, considering the quality of them and the few years in which they were brought together, it was truly a remarkable group of books for a man of comparatively limited means. Some of the manuscripts were world-famous, and came from well-

known libraries, others had come to light recently; but among them there was hardly a volume lacking in distinction or individuality, and a glance at their description shows that the owner's eagerness never obscured his discernment and sound judgment.

Owing largely to the weight of his example, no collector can now hope to obtain manuscripts of equal importance, except at prices far above those he paid; but either way the money side of these transactions meant little to him as long as there was money to draw on. A cheque was a piece of paper, and it did not matter what marks one made on it: one got in exchange a delightful work of art. If a book took his fancy, he had to have it or it haunted him; latterly he would get into a state of fidget and misery until the purchase of any book he desired was completed.

When my father was in North France with Jenny in 1891, he writes that he is avoiding Paris for fear of spending all his money in the book-shops. But going for a short holiday later with Mr. Walker, Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Cockerell, it did not need Paris to tempt him to spend. In Beauvais one morning before breakfast he said to Mr. Cockerell, "Let us go out and buy a manuscript." And indeed unexpectedly they came upon an attractive folio of the thirteenth century (Justinian's Codex) for £7. The old Antiquary told them, "It is a book of value, for the butler of the duc d'Aumale told me so."

Mr. Cockerell became my father's secretary and librarian in the autumn of 1892,* and under these conditions carried on that close study of manuscripts and early books, which, for the good fortune of the University of Cambridge and the public, has finally placed the care of the Fitzwilliam Museum in his hands. I am drawing largely on the notes from his diary for these library reminiscences. He writes of one day: "Wonderful French Book of Hours arrived from Rosenthal." This was sent on approval and Mr. Cockerell did a little bargaining over it. The answer did not come quite

* He became secretary to the Press in July 1894.

at once, but when it did and the purchase was satisfactorily concluded, the new owner, instead of being pleased at his librarian for getting £25 off the price, ungratefully remarked, "Well, but you might have lost me the book, you know!"

The whole library was sold, six months after my father's death, to Mr. Richard Bennett, who disposed of the greater part of it at Sotheby's in December, 1898, the more valuable manuscripts and printed books with woodcuts being reserved and sold later to Mr. Pierpont Morgan. The sale in London in 1898 thus consisted not of the entire library, but of the part of it not kept by Mr. Bennett. In many cases he had passed over books as important as those he retained, but in spite of this when the library appeared in public it was shorn of its chief glories.

I cannot deny myself the satisfaction of saying a few words about the acquisition of the finest of these treasures, feeling sure that the story will be read with sympathy by those who have so far followed these notes of the changing years.

I have mentioned elsewhere how my father used sometimes to bring a new purchase to the Committee meeting of the Antiscrape, or rather to the little group who supped together afterwards. The purchase of books was often made on a Thursday afternoon, when he would go into town for the weekly Committee; and there he would appear, and from the worn brown satchel used for parcel-carrying produce a modest-looking volume, sometimes protected by a velvet-lined case, sometimes bare, but inside! a fairy-story, a picture-gallery in little of mediaeval life. It must often have been difficult for him to wait for the adjournment to Gatti's and supper, in his impatience to show the new thing to his friends, especially to his crony Philip Webb. Mr. Cockerell says in his diary that one afternoon my father came in to the New Gallery (Mr. Cockerell was secretary of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition that year) with a superb little thirteenth century Psalter from Liége which Ellis had let him take away to make up his mind over, and later he came on to the

Antiscrape still cherishing the volume, having in the meantime gone back to Ellis and bought it.

One day he was beguiled into missing the Committee altogether; Mr. Cockerell went up to Quaritch's with him and they "spent some two hours in the upstairs room turning over old books, some of which W. M. could not refrain from buying. Did not get to S. P. A. B. in consequence, but went to Gatti's." Another time "W. M. at S. P. A. B. and Gatti's. He had the new MS. Romance of the Rose with him." At the beginning of the last year another pleasant meeting is recorded of my father and the two friends: "Then to Quaritch's where W.M. bought an MS. Bible for 60 guineas. Then to Lunch at the Blue Posts with Walker whom we met in Piccadilly."

It is time to mention by name a few of the famous manuscripts. This from Mr. Cockerell's Diary of 1892: "Aug. 25. Supper after Antiscrape with W. M., Philip Webb and Walker, and then to Kelmscott House with W. M. and Walker, for an hour and a half. Went into the drawing-room and looked at Psalters, including a splendid 12th c. (Huntingfield) Psalter which W.M. has borrowed from Quaritch who asks £800 for it."

But the purchase is "off" and the book goes back to Quaritch; though you have to divine the hankering that lies behind these brief words in a letter of general instructions to Mr. Cockerell two years later when the book had again come to tempt him: "Kindly take the Huntingfield to Q. in a day or two: I have told him that I am not going to buy it."

But it had to be, and nearly a year later the diary says, "W.M. went to Quaritch's with F. S. Ellis and bought the Huntingfield Psalter. He was at S.P.A.B. and Gatti's." In the book is written, "W.M. Purchased from Quaritch May 2nd, 1895." It contains a great series of pictures (two filling the whole page), all the history of the Old and New Testaments, drawn with splendid simplicity. Those of the

Old Testament are headed, up to a certain point, with descriptions as direct as the drawing, as, for instance, Moses sitting by the burning bush, his black half-boots lying before him and the legend "Ci vit moyses dex en le buisson ardent e dex li comandait deschaucer." You can imagine both the grin of delight with which the new owner hails the unconscious and fearless handling of such subjects, and the tireless admiration of the superb art of the book.

In some of the manuscripts he wrote notes intended for the catalogue of the library. In the Clare Psalter is written:

"Though this book is without figure-work, the extraordinary beauty and invention of the ornament make it most interesting, and the said ornament is thoroughly characteristic of English work; the bold folded-over leaf in the great B on the first page of the text is an undeniable token of an English hand. The great thickness of the black boundary lines is worth noting, and no doubt is the main element in producing the effect of the colour, which is unusual. The beauty of the simple blue and green Calendar will scarcely be missed by any one taking up the book."

In the Beauvais Psalter (*c.* 1270) he wrote:

"The calendar is exceedingly handsome from its wealth of gold; the roundels are very good. These ten leaves of designs, clearly done by a different hand from the other figure-work, are of the best French work, at once elegant and serious. The historiated letters are clear and bright in colour, which tends towards the English in character, the figures large in scale for their spaces, and quite firmly drawn; there is a particular charm about these letters, which take up a good space on the page. The ordinary illuminated letters are by two hands at least; the best of which is very happy: another is a little shaky in his outlines, but his colour very beautiful: these letters have suffered from the tarnishing of the white lead, which is not used in the historiated ones. The writing throughout the book is big, and bold, and as good as can be."

In a Paris Psalter of the late thirteenth century he wrote:

"This book has a complete and satisfactory scheme of ornament, which is nowhere departed from, and the colour of which is thoroughly harmonious. Many of the dragon-scrolls end in daintily painted little heads, drawn with much expression and sense of fun; and the hair of them beautifully designed, and drawn very firmly. The figure-work in the eight historiated letters is everywhere quite up to the average of its date, but on the first page in the Beatus and the symbols of the Evangelists goes a good deal beyond that. Altogether an admirable specimen of the work of the later thirteenth century."

Among the contents of the manuscript which he called the Nottingham Psalter (*c.* 1250) is the Psalterium salutationum B.V. Mariae which was printed at the Kelmscott Press (Laudes Beatae Mariae Virginis).

The Roman de la Rose was another book of delightful quality, of rather mannered fourteenth century work. It contains a number of elegantly drawn pictures in grisaille, with faint colouring (green and pink) in the trees, etc. We have heard of it already in Mr. Cockerell's diary.

About a week after the purchase of the Huntingfield Psalter the diary for 1895 notes, "May 9th. The Despenser Missal at K.H. with 616 illuminated borders." This was the great Tiptoft missal with its splendid decoration of saints and shields and leopards' heads and gold and blue vines, of huntsmen, dogs and deer, and beasts of the wild-wood.

Thence onward come a quick succession of manuscripts, one finer than the other. The Clifford Grey Hours (the Pabenham book, Fitzwilliam Museum), the twelfth-century Bestiary, the Windmill Psalter, these are the final treasure of the Kelmscott House Library, the last the very climax of beauty and interest. And the story of how they came into my father's hands adds the touch of modern romance to them.

In July 1894 Mr. Cockerell writes: "July 5: W.M. returned from Kelmscott. In afternoon I went with him to Christie's to see the Fountaine books, on one of which W.M. has set his heart.

"July 6: W.M. bought the wonderful Clifford Grey Horae for £410 and commission." A little later, after a visit to Quaritch's, Father took his new treasure to the Antiscrape to show to Philip Webb, and soon afterwards Mr. Cockerell discovered there were some leaves missing. Some time before Mr. Walker was doing the illustrations to the Fitzwilliam catalogue of manuscripts and now recognized one of those being reproduced as a leaf belonging to my father's Horae. It was then ascertained that two of the missing leaves had been given by Mr. Sanders to the Museum in 1892. After some negociation it was arranged that the book should be sold to the Fitzwilliam for £200, and that the present owner should hold it with the leaves belonging to the Museum for his lifetime. This was not done all at once of course, as a museum cannot lightly part with one of its possessions, and from time to time we hear in letters of the book and the leaves. Father writes to Jenny not long after this discovery, "Mr. Jenkinson the Cambridge University Librarian came in and I showed him THE book: he was much pleased and I think I shall most probably have *those leaves.*" Next spring Dr. M. R. James is in town with the leaves which he takes to Kelmscott House to compare with the manuscript, and in due time they once more became part of it. This transaction saved the book for this country, as it would otherwise certainly have gone to New York with those sold to Mr. Pierpont Morgan.

The figures in this manuscript are boldly drawn, the drapery highly modelled and finished, the grotesques vivacious and admirable, the page-decoration strong and simple in line. Among the characteristics are the noble big heads in the initial D's, mostly women in white kerchiefs on gold, inventive line-endings often blue and gold, and in the pictures the use of a blue of a most beautiful and luminous quality. The original owners, knight and lady, appear several times dressed in their coat-armour, and their shields adorn the pages with lively little scenes between. A book for a King's treasure.

Also the twelfth century Bestiary: of which Mr. Cockerell writes in 1896, one day in April: "Excitement at Kelmscott House about Bestiary reported by J. Rosenthal of Munich." As this manuscript could not be sent on approval, Mr. Cockerell went over to examine it, provided with a blank cheque. Mr. Rosenthal met him at Stuttgart and the purchase was concluded. The diary notes: "May 4: I got to Kelmscott at 7.30 with the Bestiary. W.M. greatly pleased."

The next day they returned to town together as often before—now for the last time.

This wonderful book (bought with the rest of the Hamilton library for the Royal Museum and Library at Berlin, resold by the Berlin authorities in 1889 and now acquired from Mr. Ellis for £900 for the Kelmscott House Library) is quite beyond description in a few passing words. To some of us the subject of it appeals almost more than any material used by the mediaeval book-makers: its strangeness and romance, its mingling of current belief and obscure legend, the atmosphere so essentially of the Middle Age: all this appeals to us specially and curiously: and nowhere but in the Middle Age could the exactly right treatment be found for this strange lore—the direct handling of subjects mystic and grotesque, the handling at once of a child and of a Wise Elder.*

What of the Windmill Psalter, the crowning glory of this collection? Again, my few sentences about it must be entirely inadequate; but the story of its acquisition may be told in conclusion.

There were certain four leaves of a fine thirteenth century manuscript in the possession of Mr. Fairfax Murray, and my father had long desired them greatly. Now he had bought from Quaritch for £5 a nice Italian manuscript of fifteenth century work (a "painter's pattern-book," my father called it, with drawings of Saints each with his appro-

* The Hamilton Bestiary is, Mr. Cockerell tells me, identical in text with the Royal MS., 12 C. xix; that is, the very arrangement, line for line, space for space.

priate symbol) that Murray wanted, and that Father did not particularly care for. So they swapped and were content. My father used to look at his four leaves and lament the mutilation of the manuscript to which they belonged—"a stunner" it must be, could it be found. He and his friends would speculate about it and wonder if it would ever turn up. Then in the following June (1896) came the Exhibition of Mediaeval Books at the Society of Antiquaries, to which he lent some manuscripts: and there in the show-cases lay his four leaves side by side with the open pages of the greater part of the manuscript itself.

Mr. Cockerell notes:

"Wed. June 3rd. Went up to Burlington House with MSS.

"Fri. June 5th. W.M. went up to B.Ho. with E.B-J. and found the Psalter to which his four leaves belong. It is the property of Lord Aldenham."

My father so longed for the manuscript that Lord Aldenham was approached and most generously consented to part with it; the diary simply records, "July 6th: W. M. bought the Windmill Psalter for £1,000 (the last book he bought)."

Another record—and this the last—of the last manuscript he handled. When the book came into his possession it was christened by him the "Golden Psalter," and the name, so well does it fit, is all the description it needs. It has since been happily acquired by Mr. Cockerell, who has written its history inside the cover, from which I take the general facts. He records that it was written at St. Albans in the twelfth century, and was bought for 2s. 6d. by Richard Heber, M.P., one of the greatest of book-collectors (b. 1773, d. 1833). After some changing of hands and a slight rise in price, Quaritch bought it at one of the Phillips' sales for £34, and in June, 1896, he sold it to my father. Mr. Douglas Cockerell bound it in old ships' timber, the pigskin half-binding decorated with the stamps of the bound Chaucer.

"It was finished and brought back to its owner at Kelm-

scott House on September 11th to his great satisfaction. It was, I believe, the last manuscript he handled and talked of a day or two before his death."

THE time has come to explain my position as regards the fragments of my father's literary work here given to the world. Some there are who think that nothing should go before the public that was not sanctioned by the writer, others that everything he left must be either published now—or burnt. To please myself in this matter has required some courage, and none the less my warmest thanks are due to friends who have given me advice, which has not always been followed. Paradoxical as it sounds, the advice one does not take is often the most helpful as well as the most encouraging: at any rate no one need consider it to be wasted.

For my own pleasure therefore I have brought in the few fragments of "Arthurian" verses that could be found (one or two have been already included in the early introductory notes), and some of those strange snatches of "young song" spoken of elsewhere. Unless anything turns up from some unexpected quarter, all my father's pieces of early date that have any quality of beauty or that in any way throw light upon his character and ideas have been considered. The unpublished poems and fragments not here included have been described and quoted from, and there remains nothing more that we should wish to be given to the world.

The "Scenes from the Fall of Troy" is printed from the unfinished manuscript, the following being the scheme of the poem, as noted down by my father:

1. Helen arming Paris ⊕
2. The Defiance of the Greeks ⊕
3. Hector's last battle ⊕
4. Hector brought dead to Troy o
5. Helen and Paris ⊕
6. Achilles' love-letter ⊕

7. The wedding of Polyxena o
8. The last fight before Troy o
9. The Wooden Horse o
10. The descent from the Wooden Horse +
11. Helen and Menelaus +
12. Aeneas on shipboard o

The signs on the right obviously refer to the state of the poem at the time of making the note, numbers 3 and 5 having been written after this preliminary stocktaking, and number 4 being in progress when the poem was abandoned.

There are two drafts of the scene between Helen and Paris, the second being headed Helen's Chamber. I have printed both, even repeating what Helen called her "arming song" in the first version, placing it where it comes on the manuscript. It was evidently intended to include it, but one cannot know if it was to come as an anti-climax when the lovers parted, or if it was merely retained, and the quatrains spaced out, for the fitting place in the scene which was to be found for it.

I imagine that most critical students of poetry would agree that the second draft was the later and the one that was to stand: it seems to me more compact and dramatic; but in the first piece there are passages so full of colour and life, so full of tenderness, that I for one cannot spare them, and—put it this way—I have no hesitation in allowing others to share the enjoyment of them.

One bold change has been made—a necessity, I think. In the scene in Helen's Chamber Achilles is spoken of as dead and in both poems the years have gone by: the air is full of foreboding and the action surely drawing sharply to the close; I have therefore transposed Achilles' Love-letter and placed it before these scenes. Any necessary additions are as usual indicated by square brackets; the punctuation had to be attended to, for the sake of clearness. I have, of course, done as little as possible in this way.

In turning over the leaves of the First Prologue to The

Earthly Paradise, one might wonder why the poet put aside so vivid and picturesque a piece of work. It is a complete story, full of movement and incident, full of strangeness and of almost Eastern imagination—once more, the narrative of a man who saw what he recounted. An added charm to the manuscript itself moreover are the little side-notes every here and there of the drawings he wanted Burne-Jones to make for the story: they are delightful glimpses of how he saw the incidents he wished to be presented—and very convincing.

I imagine that, by the time this Prologue was completed, my father had outworn his impulse to use the much-beloved ballad-quatrain, and was turning to something fresher; also that he saw that what he had written was not so much an introduction as a complete piece in itself: a book of the length he had in contemplation from the first could not be written in a metre of this kind, and for many reasons an introduction should strike the prevailing note of the whole work.

We cannot regret the sacrifice which gave us the present prologue: in the re-writing we have gained the more matured handling of the poet, and obtained a glimpse into the working of his mind, if we have lost the first blooming of the bold and luxuriant imagination of youth: the master's judgment has corrected the daring of the apprentice. For the story had run away with him, and in it we have a whole lifetime of voyage and adventure instead of the two or three vivid pictures which now live for ever in the mind of the reader.

The group of short poems of the mid period about 1865 to 1870—by which I intend the Earthly Paradise time—opens here with some verses written in a prettily bound set of The Earthly Paradise which we children shared between us. The verses were pondered over and taken to heart—and known by heart—and we loved them as children often do love poems whose serious meaning can only be learnt when the burden of life has been carried long. Enough to say, they were and always will be to us part of the book itself.

"Hapless Love" was rescued by the writer himself from

an early draft of Cupid and Psyche: it was published in Good Words, April, 1869.

Of the four sonnets included here, two, "Rhyme Slayeth Shame" and "May grown a-cold," were printed in The Atlantic Monthly, February and May, 1870. "Sad-eyed and Soft and Grey" is earlier than either of the others.

"The Story of Aristomenes" grew to be too long for inclusion in The Earthly Paradise. A portion was published as "The First Foray of Aristomenes" in the Athenæum for 13th May, 1876. I am printing the tale from the fair copy which my father gave later to Mr. Watts-Dunton,* comparing it here and there with a rough draft in my possession. There is a blank left all through for the name of Aristomenes' comrade, but the name of Bion is noted on the margin in one place, and on this authority it has been inserted in the text, for the reader's convenience without square brackets. The name of Glauce's nurse could not be dealt with thus. In Pausanias† by the by, the maiden (whose name is not mentioned) marries Gorgus the son of Aristomenes. If only the poet had not tired of his story or had not had his attention otherwise distracted, one would have seen how he dealt with the incident of Aristomenes and the fox in the cave, among other incidents. But this is one of the many vain laments over unfinished work.

"The Story of Orpheus," also fair copied for the printers, was finished up before it was rejected by the author as too weighty for the general scheme of The Earthly Paradise. There exist trial-pieces describing Orpheus' violent death at the hands of the Thracian women; also a good deal of fair copy of another opening. Two of the songs, you may remember, were included in Poems by the Way under the titles "From the Upland to the Sea" and "Meeting in Winter."

It was impossible to omit the fragmentary poem of "The

* Kindly lent by Mrs. Watts-Dunton.

† Description of Greece, translated by Sir J. G. Frazer, Vol. I, pp. 200-215, etc.

Wooing of Swanhild"; the wild splendour of the legend—itself but a fragment—is dimmed by the poet's translation into a comparatively modern atmosphere full of introspection, of hesitancies and dreams within dreams: it is indeed a far cry from the grimly-worded broken record of Sigurd's daughter preserved in the Edda Songs to this detailed narrative in a suave rhyme-royal. But it is all "part of the story"—part of the growth and development of The Earthly Paradise tales, and a link too between the frame of mind of the time and that of the later handling of the Volsung epic.

The fragment beginning "In Arthur's house whileome was I," though the subject suggests the earlier conceived Arthurian poems, is of a rather later period, and may be one of the projected stories for The Earthly Paradise. I please myself by imagining that it is the beginning of that tale on the list* which is called "The Queen of the North," but this we shall never know. (I have often asked questions in dreams about the unfinished tales, and have been on the verge of most interesting answers—pity that the dream will not carry one just over the barrier for a few precious moments.)

The beginning of a story in dramatic form which takes us North is named from the principal person. Like The Wooing of Swanhild, it is of the later Earthly Paradise time: the writer's thoughts were becoming thronged with heroic figures and historic places, the firths of Norway, the Iceland deserts—and not the least interesting feature about this sketch is that nothing could be so un-Northern, nor so full of the writer's personality in a curious undefined way.

Here then I set before you these sketches and intentions, some, poetic schemes crowded out of the busy life, some, just snatches of verse written to lay the ghost of a haunting refrain, all of them, I fear, glimpses that can but tantalize us.

The Pilgrims of Hope was written for the Commonweal of 1885-6. Mr. Buxton Forman printed the poem later for private circulation. In "The Books of William Morris"

*See p. xj, volume III.

he tells us: "I could not persuade its author to reprint it: he considered it wanted more revision than he could give it at the time. I threatened to reprint it in a decent way myself, privately of course; and as he did not forbid me, I did so."

The Message of the March Wind appeared as a single poem; then the rest came out week by week under the title adopted. Piece by piece it was written, after he had returned home—he wrote late usually—from poor quarters full of sights and stories which had wrung his heart by their sordidness and dull endurance: it was written in sorrow and anger, in revolt at the things he saw and the things he divined, and the slight, effective sketches of the narrative bring home to many of us who have lived on into the time of tragedy and violence of the Twentieth Century, the meetings and street-corner gatherings of those days of scarcely articulate unrest and discomfort. Not the least vivid of these sketches is the picture of himself answering, "hot and eager," those who came to carp and jeer at what then was new and strange.

One alteration has been made in the text of The Message of the March Wind. It had been pointed out to me * that in the third verse there is an unlucky accidental double rhyme, i.e., in "tillage fair" and "village where": this is so entirely outside the poet's usual practice that I have ventured to alter it to the more obvious "far, far." If it was a slip, it is nothing that it should have passed unnoticed through the Commonweal, the Kelmscott Press edition of Poems by the Way and the popular edition that came out soon afterwards.

The Socialist poems were written for our various choirs, and set to well-known tunes. Some of them were gathered from time to time into a penny collection, Chants for Socialists, for which there was a steady demand at meetings and open-air demonstrations. The measure of The March of the Workers is very heavy for the air—"John Brown's

* By Mr. Clutton Brock, whose kind help has often made me feel that this volume should have passed through his hands rather than mine.

body lies mouldering in the Grave," but some one unluckily furnished my father not with the original words as a guide, but with another set of verses, the long racing metre of which he followed. When he found out how much simpler the original John Brown song was, he was rather vexed about it.

The May Day Songs here printed were written for "Justice" in 1892 and 1894.

THE reduced facsimile of the Chaucer page in this volume was, as I have said, chosen with intention. The two friends have journeyed long side by side since its subject was chosen for the adornment of the fine new house, and while their later tribute to the sweet poet is different in kind it is faithful to their old affection.

Here too is the early portrait: the young man of three and twenty looking out with dreaming eyes on the world that is spread before him. He may have seen in his dreams something of the way he willed to go, but his eyes could not have followed to the end the many roads that led to fulfilment.

In a previous volume is a picture of the grave at Kelmscott —a loving drawing of how the stone was to look that the old friend who built his first house now set above him in the shadow of the elm-trees.

Within a few yards of the grey stone in its little plot of close-shorn turf the village life and labour passes: the painted waggons with their fragrant harvest burden, the long strings of tired horses, the merry-whistling carter lads .... so the heart of the sweet and bountiful land he loved with such deep passion received him again. The lime-trees that lead to the church-door sweep the grass on either side, closely roofing the graves that lie near the path. The green garden is screened by great elms, except on the northward, where beyond the yews and stone-fencing of the boundary lies cornland and blue distance. A track is worn across the grass to our grave:

a bay-tree stands at the head, at the feet a thorn between two bushes of box. An Oak branch on one side of the grey stone, a Vine on the other: and now, beside the letters into which the little mosses have clustered, another name is being cut.

The poem which brings this volume to a close was written for the embroidered hangings that furnish the carved oak bedstead at the Manor. The old bed speaks, and on an evening of early autumn, looking down from the doorway of the Tapestry Room you may see how the golden sunset fills all the silent room and lights up the scroll and the last lines of the kind message,

> But this I say
> Night treadeth on day
> And for worst and best
> Right good is rest.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

"'Twas in Church on Palm Sunday" and "Blanche" appear in The Life of William Morris by J. W. Mackail.

"Winter Weather" was published in The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, Bell and Daldy, 1855. It also appears in Mr. Mackail's Life.

"The Story of Aristomenes": an episode from this was published in The Athenæum, May 13, 1876, as "The First Foray of Aristomenes." This appeared in a privately printed pamphlet the same year, together with "The Two Sides of the River" and "Hapless Love."

"The Story of Orpheus": two of the songs, under the title of "From the Upland to the Sea" and "Meeting in Winter," were included in Poems by the Way.

"Hapless Love" first appeared in Good Words, April, 1869; and see above.

The two Sonnets, "Rhyme slayeth Shame" and "May grown a-cold," appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, February and March, 1870.

"The Pilgrims of Hope" appeared in The Commonweal, Vol. I, April, 1885, to Vol. II, July, 1886.

"The Message of the March Wind," "Mother and Son" and "The Half of Life gone" were included in Poems by the Way.

"No Master" appeared in Justice, June 7, 1884. It was reprinted in The Commonweal, March, 1889.

"The March of the Workers" appeared in the first number of The Commonweal, March, 1885. These were included in a pamphlet, Chants for Socialists (Socialist League Office, 1885), later editions of which also contained "Down among the Dead Men." This pamphlet was often reprinted, and poems from it also appear in various Labour song-books.

"May Day" and "May Day 1894" appeared in Justice, 1891, 1894.

The Verses for the Bed at Kelmscott appeared in the Catalogue of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, 1893. Mr. Mackail also quotes it in the Life of William Morris.

EARLY POEMS

SCENES FROM THE FALL OF TROY

HELEN ARMING PARIS

Troy: *on a lonely part of the walls.*

PARIS

SO, my sweet thing, a little tighter yet.
Look you, it must not rattle or some blow
Given at hazard on my knee-cap here
Would drive the thin edge in my foot. (*sighing*)
My sweet thing, shall I talk or hold my tongue?

HELEN

Shall I say, Paris, that my heart is faint,
And my head sick? I grow afraid of death:
The Gods are all against us, and some day
The long black ships rowed equal on each side
Shall throng the Trojan bay, and I shall walk
From off the green earth to the straining ship;
Cold Agamemnon with his sickly smile
Shall go before me, and behind shall go
My old chain Menelaus: we shall sit
Under the deck amid the oars, and hear
From day to day their wretched measured beat
Against the washing surges; they shall sit
There in that twilight, with their faces turned
Away from mine, and we shall say no word;
And I shall be too sick at heart to sing,
Though the rough dirt-grimed mariners may sing
Through all their weariness their rowing-song
Of Argo and the Golden Fleece, and Her
That made and marred them all in a short while,
As any potter might do with his clay,
Medea the Colchian. We shall come at last
To land in Greece, and all shall cry at me,
"See her who slew the sons of Priamus,
Who threw to earth that right fair town of Troy,

Who slew full many a mother's son of Greece!
See how she walks still like a Queen! By the Gods!
Is there no faggot for her false white limbs?
No sack, wherein, close sewn and crying out,
She may roll down the steep gulfs of the sea?
Is there no butcher's knife?"

PARIS

Nay hold, my love!
And let Greek butchers butcher their own lambs,
For you are ours: and let the sea-folk roll
Their own sea-calves in sacks of woven sea-weed,
For you are ours: and let the beechen-wood
Bake bread for Greeks: seeing that you are ours.
Look Helen, hence upon our walls of stone,
Our great wet ditches where the carp and tench
In spite of arblasts and petrariae
Suck at the floating lilies all day long;
Look at the mighty barriers of fir-wood,
And look at Ilium rising over all,
Then at the few white tents and green log-huts
Of the Greek leaguer: listen too, my love
And you shall hear the muster of our men
Down in the streets, and marching toward the gates
Of many a captain. Ah! my sweet Helen,
Full many a day shall we kiss thus and thus
Before that last day when you kiss me dead,
An old man lying where the incense burns.

HELEN

Lips upon lips is surely a sweet game;
But I have ruined you, oh poor Paris,
My poor kind knight, who never for himself
Would look a yard before his sweet grey eyes;
Who taught me how to live, when long ago
I had forgotten that the world was fair
And I was fair: who made my lying down
Right peaceful to my tired heart and limbs,

Who made my waking sweet to rested eyes, Helen
Who gave me joyful hours day by day.
In turn I give you this: no peace at all, Arming
At best your weary anxiousness put off Paris
So that it crushes not, pain and trouble, dear,
To you and all your kin; and at the worst—
O Paris, Paris, what care I for the Greeks?
They will not slay me, as I know full well,
And time will stay their babble and hard words.
Yea, I shall live a Queen while you lie slain—
But think of Troy with wolves about the streets,
Some yellow lion couched upon the place
Where first you called out, "Troy, love! this is Troy!"
And men all shouted, "Helen! the fair Dame!"
But on their skulls that lion shall look then
And bones of women that looked out at me
Calling out "Helen!"—bones of young children
Born in the siege, who never knew of peace:
Fair, tall Andromache gone who knows where,
And Hector fallen dead among the spears,
One man to hundreds, when the rest are slain
And Troy is burning: yea good Helenus
Slain at his altar, and Cassandra mocked,
Used like a jester, while the Grecian wine
Stains Priam's golden cups: and Priam slain,
And Troilus slain before his withered hope
Can spring afresh: Deiphobus dead, slain,
Thrust in some ditch the salt sea sometimes fills
When wind and tide are high: Polyxena,
Younger than me and fairer she is now,
Sadder therefore and longer shall she live
As some man's slave—In what way, love Paris
Will they slay you, I wonder? will they call,
"Come Helen, come to this our sacrifice,
For Paris shall be slain at the sea's foot"?
Or will they wake me from my weeping sleep
Dangling your head above me by the hair,

Then all day long send women to dress me,
And scent my limbs, and comb my hair and bathe
My dull red eyelids till they grow stone-white,
Then set me at the feast among the wine
In Agamemnon's tent, to hear them tell
Long tales about the war, and hear them sing
Right in mine ears forgotten songs of Greece?

PARIS

Sweet, will you count our love an idle tale,
A thing the years take from us day by day,
A thing that was once but forgotten now?
Love, though indeed the bitter death may come,
And unclasp both my arms from round your neck,
Yet have I lived once. Helen, when I think
The fairest thing the Gods have made will sit
Hours together with her cheek laid on mine
And praises my poor doings, and looks pale
When from the mellay something scratched I come—
Say, lets me love her—why today, Helen,
I feel so light of heart with my great joy
That I can scarce be sober—shall I say,
Half jesting, half in earnest, as I take
Your fair long hand and kiss it, that our folk,
All Trojans, would be glad to die for this?
By God, Helen, but half I deem it true.

HELEN

Do not believe it, Paris: bitterly
Death comes to all, and they have their own wives,
Own loves or children: Paris, you know not
What death can do: pray God you curse me not
When you leave off being happy—do you think
We can be happy in the end, Paris?
I shudder when I think of those fell men
Who every day stand round about Troy Town
And every night wipe the rust off their spears.
They have no thoughts of pleasure or of love;

Each day they rise to see the walls of Troy
Still stand unbreached, and in the dead of night
Awake or dreaming, still they think of it;
Unspoken vows lie coiled about their hearts,
Unspoken wrath is in their heavy hands,
They are become mine enemies, yet still
I am half grieved for their unspoken woes,
And longings for the merry fields of Greece:
They know themselves to be but ruined men
Whatever happens—Doubt not they will win
Their dreadful slow revenge at last, Paris.

Helen
Arming
Paris

PARIS
Look you my love, it is not well to boast
Of anything one has, for fear the Gods
Should take it from us: yet I pray you think
Of that great belt of Priam's sons, buckled
By shining Hector the great clasp of all:
The unfailing steadfast hearts of my brothers,
Shall they not match the fierce-eyed gloomy Greeks?

HELEN
O me! my brother Hector, kind and true,
How sweet thou art for ever unto me!
Yet sometime shall Achilles have his day:
Better a live dog than a dead lion, dear.

PARIS
Behold him coming, glancing with a smile
Down on the Grecian tents.

HELEN
Is it farewell
To both of you? Would I could weep for love!
But little ever have I used wet eyes
When hurt I have been. Where go you, sweet lords?

HECTOR
The word is, each in arms we meet straightway

In Priam's Hall, then out at gates go we;
And goodly tilting shall the Trojan dames
See from the walls: right thick the Greeks are set,
And even now the stones begin to fall
By the Scæan gates from their petrariae.
Why Paris! you look brave in arms today.
See you do well! Helen shall see your works.
Helen *falls.*

Helen! fair Helen!

PARIS

O my God! Hector,
What may all this forbode? She said true now,
She never wept: I never saw her weep;
But now she lies full length upon the stones
And terrible her weeping is to hear,
And terribly the sobs take half her breath:
Kneeling by Helen.
For God's sake, Helen! will you kill me, love?

HELEN

Go out and fight! I cannot speak with you,
No, no, I cannot kiss you: go, Paris.

PARIS

I will not leave you, Helen, till you do.
Tell me what ails you?

HELEN

O, Paris, Paris!
Let me lie still and leave me!

HECTOR

Come, brother!
For time presses. 'Tis better too for her;
She will weep out her full, and go to sleep,
And wake up in your arms tonight smiling.
Exeunt.

THE DEFIANCE OF THE GREEKS

A hall near the Scæan Gate, filled with lords and gentlemen of the Trojans armed; Priam *sitting in a throne on the dais, and by him* Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena, Cassandra, Deiphobus, Troilus, Helenus, *and a little apart* Æneas *and* Antenor.

PRIAM

MY faithful sons, good lords and gentlemen,
Patience a little, while I tell a tale
You all have helped to make a gallant one.
Nine years ago across the wild wan waves
There came a mighty armament of Greeks,
Whom we met straightway; all my knights who fought
That morning on the sands are here, but those
Who fell asleep amid the melody
Of meeting swords; now therefore ye all know
How the Greeks won to land, while at their backs
Broke the whiteheaded waves of the Great King,
And in their faces shone King Priam's spears;
The sea fell back behind the long black ships,
And we went back and stayed within our gates,
So that they won. What won they, Sirs, but harm?
With hale and how they drew their ships ashore
And made them walls betwixt the grass and the sea;
They pitched their tents upon the soft green grass—
Their tents were white upon the green meadows
Nine years ago. They have not sapped one wall
Nor broken any barrier of Troy Town.
And they, how many of them are dead, slain
By our good spears; the autumn damps have slain
Full many a mother's son, those who are left
Keep growing gaunt and ugly as thin wolves
While we feed fat; their white wives left behind
Are childless these nine years, or take new lords
And bear another breed of hostile sons.

The houses they all loved, far off in Greece,
Are painted fresh by men they knew not of;
Within the cedar presses the gold fades
Upon the garments they were wont to wear;
Red poppies grow now where their apple-trees
Began to redden in late summer days;
Wheat grows upon their water-meadows now
And wains pass over where the water ran,
The ancient boundaries of their lands are changed.
Yet say I Sirs, and wonder as I speak,
Such strength Jove gives unto the sons of men,
All things being changed about them they change not,
Still with stiff faces set against our walls
They gaze at Troy as if no walls were there
Nor any Trojans but their proper slaves.
Hear the same message you have heard them send
Each year these nine years to the Lords of Troy.

[*Enter* Talthybius.]

Ho! Ho! Sir Herald of the Grecian Kings
Speak out your message fearlessly and well.

TALTHYBIUS

O Priam King of Troy, and all ye lords,
Thus sayeth Agamemnon King of men:

Give back my brother's wife! You Trojan men
Are overbold to take for your own selves
The fairest woman that the Gods have made.
Yea, when the goldsmith's crucible burns red
Snatch thence a handful of the fine red gold,
Or let Sir Paris go with naked hands
And take the yellow lion's shining teeth
To make chess-kings withal, but leave alone,
For all your pride I bid you leave alone
A Grecian Queen wife of a King of Greece.
For sweet delight and fair to look upon,
Yet deadly shall Queen Helen be to you.

Nevertheless one chance ye have of life;
Send Helen back gold-crowned and robed with gold,
And Paris with his hands in iron bonds,
And pay such tribute yearly as we fix;
So shall Troy stand and all of you do well.
Or else: so many years as we in tents
Have borne the heat and cold, so many days,
So many days the blood-red flame shall lick
The pale white marble of your palaces;
And many a thousand years the frost shall bite
Upon the places where your hearths have stood.
These nine years now upon the Trojan land
We have not seen the faces of our wives,
Therefore hereafter shall your wives, spinning
And weaving white wool in the halls of Greece,
Forget the faces of their lords we slew.
No children of our true line have we seen
These nine long years, so therefore take ye heed
This generation ye have got shall get
But Trojan slaves unto the Lords of Greece.
Behold your doom; your very name shall live
But with our story, and all men shall say
Standing upon some grass-grown mounds of earth,
That look across the sea: This was Troy Town
The Greeks threw down by help of Father Jove.

The Defiance of the Greeks

PRIAM
O Herald of the Greeks, take back these words
And tell your King and all the Grecian host
I would not listen to such speech as this
If all our walls were lying on the ground
And all our spears were broken in our hands;
Moreover say, Be ready, for today
We purpose to drive down towards the sea
These robbers now so overbold in speech.
And in reward of well remembered words
Take you Sir Herald this fair golden cup,

And if hereafter safe from all these wars
You sit an old man in the market-place,
Remember then you spoke with Priam once.

TALTHYBIUS
Long live King Priam, but in better mind
Toward my own Lord the mighty King of Men.

PRIAM
Lords, let him have some ringing in his ears:
Which of you will go fight the Greeks today?

ALL *shout*
Ho Priam! Priam! death to all the Greeks!

Talthybius *goes. Enter* Hector *and* Paris *armed.*

HECTOR
As I stood with my hand upon the lock
I heard a shout that truly seemed to me
Better than any singing I have heard.
Good lords and brave, be stiff in arms today
And never faint nor think of things to come,
Nor think of death, nor think of ease and peace,
But only think which side your blows shall fall,
Which side to press the Greeks. Look to your folk
And if ye see them faltering then press on,
Cry out aloud, say "Ho for Priam!" then,
And if ye see them gaining, still press on
Before the foremost, else shall ye be shamed:
Nor ever faint, nor think to take your ease,
Nor ever rest, for so are battles lost.
Nor are these Grecians men to play withal
But stern and stout, a good match for our best.
I say again, lords, think to take no rest,
Nor think of turning more than if there were
A deadly flaming gulf behind your backs.

And such a gulf there is, by all the Gods!
Think not to live good days if once ye flee;
To spend your money in this pleasant place;
To live at rest and peace with wife and child.
The frightened man shall have good cause for fear.
Faint not good lords, as ye love me today;
Be full of joy, trust in each other well.

TROILUS
Fair brother Hector, such sad words as these
Were fitter for some other men than we
Who never think to flee before the Greeks.

HECTOR
Fair brother Troilus and all good lords,
I said not this as unto craven men;
But when two meet, one must be slain or yield.
Yield not nor think it possible to yield,
Nor think to save yourselves to fight again
And so is all gained. Yet another word—
Fight so today to make this fight the last,
Beat back the Greeks that gather even now
Up to the gates, and smite their host in two,
Break through Ulysses at the fenced camp,
Scatter old Nestor at the ships to nought,
Light up a beacon ere the night come on
And make their ships a sea-sign unto ships.

Great Jove, I pray thee give me this today,
To break this leaguer in a single fight!
Thou knowest Jove that I would do for thee
A greater thing than this, if I were Jove
And thou wert Hector clad in mortal arms.

CASSANDRA
O Hector brother, what vain words are these?
O Latmian, let me speak or keep me blind;

Woe! Woe! Ye Trojans who believe me not,
Last night Apollo showed me a sad thing,
Hector shall die, shall die before the night.

TROILUS
Cassandra hold thy peace! Afield, afield!
Brother, afield before their cheeks grow white.

CASSANDRA
I say no! no! Press round him all ye lords,
He is your leader, if he falls ye fall.
Alas Troy falls, the pleasant city burns;
And I burn; save me from this bitter pain.

CRIES *from without.*
Ho Pallas! for Ulysses of the Isle!
The King of men for the Achæan folk!
Ajax, out, out! Teucer for Salamis!
Achilles for the Myrmidons of Greece!

HECTOR
Hear you? Achilles is afield; out! out!
Ho! Hector for the sons of Priamus!
Kind sister leave me, for you fight for Greece
Frightening brave lords that the Greeks cannot fright.

CASSANDRA
Come here Andromache and lay your hand
Upon his breast, your child before his feet,
And I will always hold him by the hand;
Priam and Hecuba, come here and kneel
And pray your son to spare you, and you lords
Whose blood is old and calm, make you a hedge
And stop him; verily now I do not rave,
For if he meet Achilles he shall die.

ANDROMACHE
My lord I pray you stay at home today
Or else I die; look at my tears, sweet lord,

Remember our sweet wooing, and the time
We lived together ere the Greeks came here:
And we may live for many another day
And be as happy if we can but live.

The Defiance of the Greeks

HECTOR
Go back Andromache and weep, if I
Must die today, as like enough I must;
But may not the Greek arrow find me here
Skulking and recreant; who knows what may chance
If I stay from the field? The walls are strong,
The Gods are stronger: love, I must not stay.
Farewell my sweet, but feel before you go
This horn and steel and mighty blackened hide
That many a time has thrown the iron back,
Scarce weaker than the walls of stone and lime.

ANDROMACHE
The God is strong within you O my Lord—
A bitter God he is to me I trow;
Farewell, farewell, what hope is left me?

CASSANDRA
Wretched Andromache, no hope is left,
No hope is left to me, alas alas!
What cruel pain is this! I burn with pain
Yet do not quench me in that bath of blood
Under the net; O woman, slay me not!
Will no one help me that I may live still?

ÆNEAS
Are we not going yet? this will make us fools
If we hear this for long; lady, let be!

HECTOR
Come out my friends; I hear the merry noise
Of horns and arms and feet of marching men;

Our folk are gathered. Set the doors wide then,
Be joyful, lords, nor think of any rest;
Forget this wailing sorrowful and weak,
For ye are men and fear not any chance:
I say forget all things that have been done,
Nor trouble ye your hearts to think at all
Of what may follow; for in Jove's name now
Whether I live or die I promise you
Glory and honour, yea and victory!
Trumpets blow up! fellows I bid you cry
Ho Hector for the sons of Priamus!

HECTOR'S LAST BATTLE

The fields before Troy.

The Trojan army retiring slowly before the Greeks.

AJAX OILEUS

Now for the gates, now for the walls thereto.
One charge now, come, they cannot bide us long.
Ho Greeks why march ye on so slow?
Remember you how iron is beat out
Blow upon blow when yet it is red hot.

AJAX TELAMON

Nay nay Oileus, they are not beat yet.
Keep close lads and beware how your array
Gets loosened: Ho Oileus, press on, Greeks!

HECTOR

So so, ye are heating: will you have it then?
Spears here for Hector! back with them, good lads!
Ah Ajax, 'ware my spear point! keep your feet,
And so go back. Lo there, you kneel to me!

AJAX [TELAMON]
Ho Diomed to aid! this way, this way!

TROILUS
Which way goes Diomed? which way, which way?

DIOMEDES
Here am I, Troilus; will you win ought?

TROILUS
Nay I have nought to win, and yet perdie
You may lose something, Pallas to my aid!

HECTOR
Now my good Trojans, follow Hector's spear.
Long-seeing brother Helenus, say now
If hence the Scæan gates are clear to you.
Can you see ought? The dust is in mine eyes.

HELENUS
Nay shield me Hector while I turn my back.
Lo, lo the spear points shine over the gates!
Now down they go, the door is just ajar.
Ho they are coming! Shout aloud with me
Ho room for Venus, room for Venus there!

Enter Æneas *and his company running.*
The Trojans *opening right and left.*

[ÆNEAS]
For mother Venus! out ye thieves of Greece!
Behold your table spread, good fellows mine,
Feast now your full.

AGAMEMNON
Ho, bide them steadily,
These are but men. Go fellow, to the camp
And bid Ulysses run with all his folk.

The Greeks *fall back.*

HECTOR
O Jove, I pray that thou wouldst do for me
What well thou knowest I would do for thee,
If thou wert Hector, I were Jove today.
Ho my good fellows, follow and strike in!
They cannot hold together; ho for peace!

They charge, the Greeks *are broken.*

Exeunt fighting.

Enter Troilus *and rout.*

TROILUS
Ho you Sir Knight wearing a lady's glove,
Is Diomed a-running with the rest?
Turn with your rout and meet me if you dare!

Enter Diomed *with rout.**

Exeunt omnes fighting.

Enter Achilles *and troops.*

ACHILLES
So, so! our headstrong kings are being well beat
As they might well have thought to be: but I
No stroke have struck, nor any of my men,
Nor will we till I meet my foe alone
Or worsted somewhat by mere numbers—ah
What din and shouts! by God! I just half doubt
I might [have] done a wiser thing and helped.

* The author evidently intended to write this episode.—Ed.

They'll burn the ships and if he should come back
With no one after him but his own men
Why I must run or die. Go we aside
And lurk behind the hawthorn bushes thick
Where the fight has not been today as yet.

Hector's Last Battle

Exeunt.

Enter Hector *with his helmet in his hand.*

HECTOR
Well I have done enough today I think;
Rest, head, thou waggest merrily as yet
On Hector's shoulders. Jove, how hot it is!
Pray you O Goddess of these trodden flowers,
Keep well my hawberk and my wambeson.
Here will I rest me for a little while
Till Troilus come. Ah but he comes at once.

Enter Achilles.

ACHILLES
Caught Hector, caught! ho Myrmidons spread round!
Look now, that man there rising to his knees
Unarmed and all alone, the same is he
Has slain your kindred by the twenty: Sirs,
Can ye not shout? have ye no words for that?
I am as happy as a man can be.

HECTOR
Little thought I that I should ever pray
Not to be slain by you, Achilles: thus
Pray I this day by Jove and all the Gods.

ACHILLES
Upon your knees, my Hector, now pray out.

HECTOR
Upon my knees I pray you to spare me
For knighthood's sake, yea make me not ashamed
When I go down with Hermes 'neath the earth,
That ever in the field I met with you
As man to man. Well will you be apaid,
No ounce of gold will stay behind in Troy
If I say, Give.

ACHILLES
Hector, am I a fool
To come to Troy and suffer many things,
Forgetting Troy and all that is within,
And then when Troy lies here within my hand
Let it slip out? and yet go [on] I pray;
Your speaking is as music to mine ears.

HECTOR
O Troy and light of day farewell, farewell,
With all I fought for! Nay I will not dance
To this man's piping, nay I will not wait
Till slowly he shall come and cut my throat,
Unhelmed unfenced: yet have I my good sword.
Ho Hector for the sons of Priamus!
Who will be first of you—what, not a man
But ye behind who finger your bowstrings!
O Jove I thank thee that I die hot blood.
Ho Hector for the sons of Priamus!

HECTOR BROUGHT DEAD TO TROY

The Streets of Troy *near the Scæan Gates.*

Many women lamenting: Enter Paris, T[roilus], D[eiphobus], Æ[neas], *and others armed, with the body of* Hector *borne on a litter in his arms.*

FIRST WOMAN
Yea as I said: such greeting as we can
We give you, lords.

SECOND WOMAN
Where were you, Troilus?
Where were you, Paris, why do you come back?

THIRD WOMAN
Nay mother, but he weeps.

SECOND WOMAN
Why dry-eyed then?

FOURTH WOMAN
Another chance, another chance today
Not ending here, Zeus! women, pray with me
He is not dead: pray that the leech may find
Some spark: where is he? Stand aside you there
Æneas from the body.

TROILUS
Good women,
Look here at me; I am your fighting man,
Best man of Troy; I fight that I may die.

FOURTH WOMAN
Gods spare the city, keep our children safe!
Cry harrow friends, let's shriek our prayers aloud.

PARIS
Ah cry aloud, but who shall hearken you,
Promise great gifts and goodly lives henceforth?
Stretch out your hands beneath the golden shrines,
Take no thought, mothers, when a child is born
How you may feed him ere a month is gone,
Take no thought, maidens, what day you shall wed,
Take no thought, children, how you shall grow up,
Take no thought, dames, which day your deathday is:
Think of today—no further, I rede you.

FIFTH WOMAN
Ah master Paris, who wrought all this work?

SIXTH WOMAN
Yea who! yea who!

[PARIS]
Good women, who but I?
Content you, I am dead or all as dead.

[A VOICE]
Die without kissing then; give back Helen.

TROILUS *turning sharply*
A man said that; who backs him?

[A VOICE]
Dame Helen to the Greeks!

TROILUS
Shame, beaten hounds!
Nay friends give ear—

[A VOICE]
Dame Helen back again—
Back to the Greeks!

DEIPHOBUS

Ho brother Hector, help!
They brawl here; give the word fair mouth I pray.

Hector brought Dead to Troy

PARIS (*drawing*)
Ulysses and you Diomedes there,
Who crowd about and give me no fresh air,
No standing place, I might say, all you Greeks
You wish to see a man die, then you shall:
Only stand back—you must slay me at last.

ÆNEAS
Alas he raves! Fair Paris, come with me.

PARIS
No prisoner, by the Gods! I will not live
To be a prisoner—

ÆNEAS

Paris, know your friends.

PARIS
Give me fresh air and I will fight it out.
Why should you grudge me space in killing me?
I never was hard, but willingly gave gifts.
You will not? see then—ah my sword is gone!
This is some dream, nevertheless with hands (*struggling*)
And teeth and feet I fight for air today—
For air, and Helen with her cool soft hands
About my forehead. Helen the good dame—
Out out, ye thieves of Greece! Ah death at last.

TROILUS
Now who says Helen back again I pray?
Is this some clown who knows not what he does
Or gentle Paris driven mad with grief?
Hector is dead: ye women, back from him;

Let be your gasping, and you men, say now,
Say now who dares send Helen to the Greeks.
Where are the Greeks? where are the walls of Troy
And Priam's sons Æneas, Menon here,
Antenor, Polydamas, Pandarus?
Ask Menon where Achilles is this tide,
Who like a lion when her whelp is touched
Flew on him: Gods how the mail went atwain!
How the bones rattled! Lord Achilles cried—
Lord thief, lord traitor—Help me Myrmidons!
This man is two, each side of me he comes—
Ho fellows, strike in quick.

ÆNEAS

Yea Sirs, a word,
For my lord Troilus of himself says nought:
Into the press came Diomed softly
And like a cunning fighter, on each side
He put the strokes that met him: traversing
With little labour till his turn might chance.
Then comes my lord King Priam's youngest son,
With no hair on his face, Sirs, as you see,
Who all day long had struck the greatest strokes
And bent his knees and stiffened up his back;
But when his eye caught Diomedes' eye
He cried and leapt—crur, how the handles jarred!
"Ah Sir," says Diomed—

TROILUS (*aside*)

Nay hold thy peace:
My heart is not all steel.

[ÆNEAS]

Tush man, I know
I will but lie. "Ah Sir," says Diomed,
"Take this for Helen on our side." Coolly
Drawn back a little, with a measured stroke

He swung his sword as at a beechen tree
A woodman might his axe; but Troilus,
That wearied Knight, with a great straightforth stroke
Smote right across the face of Diomed
And felled him.

Hector brought Dead to Troy

ACHILLES' LOVE-LETTER

Troy. Priam's *Palace.*

Hecuba *and* Paris.

HECUBA (*laying down a letter*)
Paris my son, what do they in the field?

PARIS
Fair Mother, nothing.

HECUBA
Who went out today?

PARIS
I know not. Nobody I think—Glaucus—
Scarce anyone—

HECUBA
Why when did you go out?
I have not seen you armed these many days.

PARIS
A week ago I went out.

HECUBA

Where's Helen, Paris?
Why Paris, not in the field or with Helen?
What is it, my fair son?

PARIS

Sooth I forgot,
Or yesterday I should have seen her.

HECUBA

Son
What ails you? are you ill now?

PARIS

No, Mother.

HECUBA

Yet you grow thinner and your cheeks are pale,
You scarcely speak who used to be so gay;
No naming now of Helen makes you start,
You neither kiss nor fight.

PARIS

Why I am sick,
Sick unto death, nay but far worse than death—
If indeed ought is worse, for death will come,
For death will come at last.

HECUBA

For your sickness
There is some remedy perchance at hand,
If you are sick of mind and soul like me,
Sick as our fields are with the Grecian heels
Upon their hearts. I wonder though of you:
The others mostly are but glad or sad
Just as the day brings weal or woe with it,
But nothing moves you, neither some Greek slain
Nor some great lord with his outlandish men
Come to our aid with many wains of corn.

PARIS
Why should it? even in hell there is some change,
Or I suppose so—all the days are not
One quite alike another; like enough
The days are here however; fitter so,
'Tis more like hell.

HECUBA
Speak good words, fair my son.

PARIS
Mother, I say we have slipped down to hell
Not knowing it; yea each man in his place,
Houses and cattle, slaves and goods and all,
Greeks, leaguers, all have fallen into hell
Unwitting—Mother, as they sapped and breached
And we drew bow and arblast, we fell down,
And here we are, glaring across the walls,
Across the tents, with such hate in our eyes
As only damned souls have, and uselessly
We make a vain pretence to carry on
This fight about the siege which will not change
However many ages we stay here.

HECUBA
I pray you Paris, do not speak to me
As if you would shriek presently, nor look
With such fierce eyes as if you hated me.

PARIS
Mother, see now why I go not to fight:
It is no use, I tell you; yea see now
Why I cannot see Helen. I loved her
And do not wish to drive her mad with fear.
If she should weep I think I should kill her.

HECUBA
Ah times are changed: the merry days are gone

When 'twixt the east wind and the cold bright sun
You grew a stout youth on the mountain tops.
Ah times are changed: the merry days are gone
When 'twixt the sunny houses and the sun
You rode with Helen through the streets of Troy.
Ah times are changed: the merry days are gone
When sitting 'twixt the fair bed and the wall
I left you kissing Helen on the mouth.
Ah times are changed: the merry days are gone
When 'twixt the spears and blazoned shields of Kings
I watched you fighting from the walls of Troy—
Ah times are changed since first I bore you, dear!

PARIS
Mother go on and you will make me weep—
Sing to me as the nurses did of old.

She sings:

YEA, in the merry days of old
The sailors all grew overbold:
Whereof should days remembered be
That brought bitter ill to me?
Days agone I wore but gold,
Like a light town across the wold
Seen by the stars, I shone out bright:
Many a slave was mine of right.

Ah but in the days of old
The Sea Kings were waxen bold,
The yellow sands ran red with blood,
The town burned up both brick and wood;
In their long-ship they carried me
And set me down by a strange sea:
None of the Gods remembered me.

Ah in the merry days of old
My garments were all made of gold,

Now have I but one poor gown
Woven of black wool and brown.
I draw water from the well,
I bind wood that the men fell:
Whoso willeth smiteth me,
An old woman by the sea.

Achilles' Love-Letter

What, will the shrill pipe of an old woman's voice
Draw forth your tears, my merry son that was?
Weep Paris, weep that we are fallen so low
Achilles dares to write these words to me.

PARIS
What what, Mother?
(*reads*) "Again I write to you
In spite of all your bitter words; again
I beg the fair Polyxena to wife"—
I wish he was in hell.

HECUBA
Read through, Paris.

PARIS *reads*
"Thou knowest how many men there are with me
And how I am right strong and brave [withal]:
Lo I can save Troy—am I not the pin
That holds the axle to the tree for them?
Yea I can save Troy—will you have it saved?
And after all for this, Polyxena:
Give her me now and Troy is saved I say;
Withhold her, and by God that made my soul
She shall be brought naked before my men
And wedded to me in your very bed,
While yet my fellows set fire to your house
And both my hands are painted with your blood.
I am a plain man, hear my words: again—
Give me Polyxena in loving wise:

Then shall you see the merry eastern wind
Fill the Greek sails. Or else I swear shall be
Nothing but fire and sword on you and yours:
All men know now you cannot hold out long."

Achilles, Troy may burn, but by Jove's head
Its flames shall never sparkle in your eyes!
O innocent and white Polyxena,
By your pure life I swear this man shall die!
O glorious Hector, by your life and death
I swear that this your murderer shall die!
O faithful good and true knight Troilus
Bright as your true love shineth evermore
In vain, ah! who shall doubt in vain, in vain!
Ah Mother mine if but one year agone
It had been said: Meet not this man in arms
But smite him unawares—I had spat out,
But now—alas! my honour is all gone
And all the joy of fight that I had once
Gone mouldy like the bravery of arms
That lie six feet under the Trojan turf.
Ah when I think of that same windy morn
When the Greeks landed with the push of spears:
The strange new look of those our enemies,
The joyous clatter, hurry to and fro,
And if a man fell it was scarce so sad—
"God pity him" we said and "God bless him,
He died well fighting in the open day"—
Yea such an one was happy I may think,
Now all has come to stabbing in the dark.

Lo I will do this for the Trojan town—
Jove give us joy of it. If the worst should come
It is but one more man to make the tale
That must be slaughtered ere the story ends.
Speak Mother, tell us how it must be done.

HECUBA
Son, I will answer these his bitter words
Saying how hard it is to yield to him
But that I cannot longer bear against—

Achilles' Love-Letter

PARIS
Amid our butchery and filth and lies
I swear by all your love this man shall die:
Fairly or foully he shall die by me.

HECUBA
Well said, my son, and he might say perdie
That whether or no he maketh peace with us
Small help shall he be to the Greeks henceforth.

PARIS
So Mother, shall I send a herald back
And challenge him to meet me in the field?
Or next day that we fight shall I go forth
And in his sight trail this most foul letter
In mire of the Trojan fields, and then
Meet spear to spear, with God to help the right?

HECUBA
Now listen son Paris, nor start aside
At what I say: did you not say just now
Fairly or foully? Dear, I fear me much
You are no match in muscles and rude skill
To this same butcher, yet he must be slain.

PARIS
How Mother, and must I turn stabber too?

HECUBA
Like begets like, Paris; he began first:
What fairness did he use with my two sons,
God curse him! and shall you stand opposite

And feel his blows fall heavier as you grow
Weaker and weaker calling upon God?
This weight of ills yet shall not be,
Have fair Polyxena sent to him there
Lest but his handmaid she become to be
And not his wife, whereby it might well come
When he was weary of her some years hence
To some Sidonian merchant oversea
She might be sold—So let him come to town
And in Apollo's temple wed with her
And with this message would I send my ring
To be true sign. Paris, you know your part—

PARIS
And in Apollo's temple her white feet
Shall creep and curdle as Achilles' blood
Across the marble glides to make them red.

HELEN'S CHAMBER

Helen, Paris.

PARIS
ANOTHER life I dreamed about, no doubt,
Shepherding sheep on Ida; other dreams
Were in my heart when Priam sent me forth,
And 'twixt the rowers in my arms I stood,
The merry sound of trumpets in mine ears
And on my face the sprinkling of the spray
When the first wave outside the harbour mouth
Ran in a green ridge up against the oars.
The feat of arms I did in Cythera,
Did that begin the life I dreamed about
And ended all my dreams of such a life
In a long dream-like year of peace and love?

HELEN
I would that all might come again, Paris,
For sometimes I grow weary, growing old.
You stay with me today.

Helen's Chamber

PARIS
No arms today:
Deiphobus thinks that something may be done
Worthy the high beginning of the siege.

HELEN
Then I shall sing that you may go merry.

PARIS
No, keep your song till I come back in peace,
And on your fingers count my slaughtered Greeks.

HELEN
Again no: someone else has armed you now
Yet you shall listen to my arming song:

LOVE, within the hawthorn brake
Pray you be merry for my sake
While I last, for who knoweth
How near I may be my death.
Sweet, be long in growing old
Life and love in age grow cold,
Hold fast to life, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death.
Trouble must be kept afar
Therefore go I to the war;
Less trouble, love, among the spears
Than with harsh words about your ears.
Love me then, my sweet and fair
And curse the folk that drive me there,
Kiss me sweet, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death.

PARIS
Tomorrow by about this time, my love,
I think I shall know that I have a hope:
I shall remember you.

HELEN
Tell me Paris,
What will you do, what will you do today,
And are you going now to slay yourself
Or throw yourself among the Grecian spears?
Life is not pleasant as it used to be,
But will you make it worse to me, Paris?

PARIS
Take off my helmet and sit down by me
And kiss me in the old way with your lips,
Holding my face between your hands again—
So like a picture nothing will make move
This seems at first; ah Helen, as you kiss
I live again! I have not lived for months.
Breathe life into my body: [as] of old
Sing sweet and let me sing, and bid your maids
Behind the arras play upon the harp—
Yet stop awhile and think—ought I to live?
Helen of Lacedaemon was my love,
Achilles of the Myrmidons I slew,
Hector and Troilus were my lief brothers,
The third lord was I in the town of Troy:
What shall I be if I should live a year
Or over deserts fleeing for my life
To Africa where Menon was a king,
Scarce life from day to day? my love shall be gone
Sitting a scolded child in Grecian halls,
And none of all my house shall be alive,
The dust of Troytown shall be blown across
The bitter waters by the cold East wind
That over Syrtes shall blow hot on me—

Alas these kisses sweet and this music
Shall be remembered but to bitter grief
When weaponless I hide me in some cave
Until the terrible lion shall be past,
And speechless, seeing I know not their tongue,
Before the blacks I kneel upon my knees
Praying for life. Yea, shall I hope for this?

Helen's Chamber

HELEN
Comfort you Paris, hope for better days
And live, my sweet, live with me this one day
Merrily, sound the harps with some sweet strain:
Is not this living? lo forget all woes
And stay at home today and do not die.
Time will there be for dying after all
When the first Greek sets hostile foot in Troy.

PARIS
No time for dying then upon the walls,
No time for dying when our comrade's hand,
Laid light upon our shoulder, through the steel
Feels hot and heavy as we run to meet
The long spears of the Greeks thrust out in Troy.

I should escape and being fled from Troy
No more a Lord, should grow to such a wretch
As through all wretchedness would strive to live.
God help me—Comfort me, you say, and hope!
Three months ago I hoped for better days—
Not now, not now. And yet today, my love,
I shall not throw myself among the spears
Or on the bitter iron of my sword,
Only I have a deeming of my death.
Trust me, today my fence shall be right good,
And every buckle of my armour, love
See you it is well strained, that locked in steel
I may live over this one day at least,

And for a little live thus in your arms
With merry music such as now they sing.

HELEN
Paris my love, you break my heart I think—
And yet 'tis broken, and the music sounds,
Albeit so merry, like sweet merry bells
That set one weeping. Lo again my love
My fingers dull your shining steel harness,
And in a little all will be well done
For this ill parting. Still again, again,
Kiss me again and now I ope the door,
Lift up the curtain—will you really go?

PARIS
Farewell Helen—God keep all true lovers!

HELEN
Farewell my love. [*Paris goes.*]
And he is gone at last—
Turned down and sealed the letter is at last
And shall I ever see those words again?
Ho there my maids! come with me to the walls
To see which way the fight will go this tide.

HELEN'S CHAMBER

[SECOND VERSION]

Paris, Helen.

HELEN

PARIS in arms again! alas my heart!
Why go you forth to fret me? stay with me.

PARIS

I may not choose but go or lose fair fame;
All men go forth today and I with them:
Deiphobus hath hope, though I have none.

HELEN

Ah Paris, always harping on that string?
We are not worsted yet; though we have lost
Our Hector and our Troilus, no less
The terrible Achilles is but dust
And many another.

PARIS

Yea, Achilles, yea—
Would I could see thee and know how it fares
With thee and those that go beneath the earth!
Helen farewell, and have no hope for me.

HELEN

Hold thy peace Paris of such evil words!
What is thy madness—heavy dreams again?

PARIS

I have not dreamed at all of good or bad,
But on my heart a dreadful weight is laid
That nothing moves; horrible thoughts come thick
And scare me as I stand alive and well.
Yea, like some man am I that lies and dreams

That he is dead, and turning round to wake
Is slain at once without a cry for help.
Yea I am all as dead, sweet, for nothing
But even this shadow of the mighty death
Can make my life so poor a thing to have.

HELEN

Alas Paris, and death indeed is strong
When this same shadow of him can slay love.
You gaze with other eyes than you were wont,
You do not look at me, and scarce even
You speak but to yourself.

PARIS

Yea why not die?
I have seen men that did not fear to die,
Yea I myself have never feared to meet
Sharp death among the spears; I have seen men
Who said that life was nothing unto them,
They had outlived all joy and longed to die.
And what joy will be left to me, Paris,
If I should live another year on earth?
Helen of Lacedaemon was my love,
Achilles of the Myrmidons I slew,
Hector and Troilus were my lief brothers,
The third lord was I in the Town of Troy;
What shall I be if I should live a year
Or over deserts fleeing for my life,
Scarce live from day to day, my sweet love gone
Sitting a scolded child in Grecian halls?
The dust of Troytown shall be blown across
The bitter waters by the cold east wind
That over Syrtes shall blow hot on me:
And all the sweet sweet music of my life
Shall be remembered but to bitter grief
When weaponless I hide me in some cave
Until the terrible lion shall be past,

And speechless (seeing I know not their tongue)
Before the blacks I kneel upon my knees
Praying for life—Yet shall I pray for life
And so I pray, now death is come on me.

HELEN
O Paris would you have your life again
If so you might, or any piece of it?

PARIS
O Helen in such wise I cherish it
My dear sweet life, that but for death itself
I would forget death and be merry now.

HELEN
Forget it love, and as in winter cold
Folk sit about the fire and shut out
The bitter blustering east wind and the frost,
So here within my arms be merry now
A little while the last hours of your life.

PARIS
Helen farewell, for I am grown like one
Who sees across the fordless swift river
His brothers stand in arms while at his back
The clatter of the chase grows loud. Helen
You were my life and you would be my life,
But life and all is going. Hear you now
The footsteps of the captains and the cries—
Now must I go where Jove will send me to.
One kiss at last, one bitter bitter kiss,
O life and death together. Sweet Helen!
[*He goes*]

HELEN
Now have I lost my love!—yet perchance not;
If he comes back then will I say to him

What now I should have said: Paris, tonight
With twenty chosen men come forth with me,
Come down upon the beach and sail we forth
Where Jove shall lead us and the mighty winds,
And let the Greeks and Trojans fight their fight
Or do whatso they list, but we will live
Apart from strife till we grow old and die.

LOVE, within the hawthorn brake
Pray you be merry for my sake
While I last, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death.

Sweet, be long in growing old,
Life and love in age grow cold;
Hold fast to life for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death.

Trouble must be kept afar
Therefore go I to the war.
Less trouble is there among spears
Than mid hard words about your ears.

Love me then my sweet and fair
And curse the folk that drive me there,
Kiss me sweet! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death.

THE DESCENT FROM THE WOODEN HORSE

Troy: *In the Wooden Horse.*

Agamemnon, Menelaus, Diomedes, Ulysses, Nestor, Ajax Telamon, Teucer, Ajax Oileus, *and others.*

AJAX *to* ULYSSES

NOW may we speak? are they not gone away?
It must be dead night now. I am nigh dead:
By the Gods their stupid singing of loud hymns
Nigh made me mad, nigh was I screaming out.

TEUCER

And we heard Helen we have fought about
These ten years: sickening for a caged man
To hear her speak and not to see her face—
Gods how I burn with fever!

ULYSSES

Hist, heroes—
No words. (*listening*)
[ ] What is it, Prince of Ithaca?

[*One sings from without*]

O my merchants, whence come ye
Landing laden from the sea?

ULYSSES

Sinon I hope, but wait what followeth.

[*Outside*]

O my merchants, whence come ye
Landing laden from the sea?
Behold we come from Sicily,
Corn and wine and oil have we,
Blue cloths and cloths of red
Merry merchants, when you are dead
We shall gain that you have lorn.

Out, merchants from the sea
Your graves are not in Sicily;
The corn for me, the wine for thee,
The blue and the red for our ladies free.

[ ]
There there, 'tis Sinon—give the counter sign—
Three blows on the head, on the breast three.

ULYSSES (*striking with a hammer on the breast of the horse*)
These for the fair fame that the Gods give us,
(*On the head*)
And these that we have gained the thing we sought.
Unbolt, Ajax, be ready with your spears,
(*They open the horse*)
This dark night seemeth like the bright noon day:
We are alive in Troy. Down, my sweet lords.

AJAX (*leaping down*)
First man in Troy. O Jove I give thee thanks!

TEUCER
O the free merry wind and driving rain!
This is like gaining heaven after hell.

PYRRHUS
Ah did you hear them how they praised the Gods
Because the Greeks were gone?—in yonder house
They dream no doubt of walking quietly
In the sweet meads again. Shall we slay them?
I long to begin killing.

[DIOMEDES] Soft, fair Sir,
We are not yet so many men in Troy
As to do that we will: speak not so loud.
I can tell you now, Ulysses, now we are

Here in the open air and streets of Troy,
That while we squatted in the horse's ribs
More than one time was I well nigh minded
To give a shout and use my spear on you,
So maddened was I with the hope and fear,
And ever wait and wait—but peace, fair Sir,
We are some thirty men amid our foes,
Here must we stay and hold the gate at least;
Sinon is gone to bring the others up.

Descent from the Wooden Horse

[AGAMEMNON]
Then shall we finish all our bitter siege,
And this last day of ugly nightmare dreams
That vexed us in the belly of the horse
Shall be a thing to laugh at three hours hence.
The rain falls softly after the bright day
And ever from the sea the southwest wind
Blows over us from Greece where we would be.
Noiseless as this same rain has God set us
Down here in Troy, and as the steady wind
Shall we prevail.
O Trojan folk,
The end of your wrong-doing draweth near:
No crying mercy now the end is come!
Yea, is the end come of our ten years' siege.
We may go home and sit beside our wives,
And by our hearths tell all our deeds of arms:
Yea, if we never do another deed
Worthy of note in all our lives henceforth
We still have won us a right noble name,
And men hereafter may well say of us,
Whate'er the Gods send turn ye not aside,
Thus was it that the Greeks won Troy at last.

MENELAUS
There is a certain one in this doomed town
Who thinks the worst is over, and fears now

Nothing but coming eld and death at last:
I shall be as a ghost to her tonight.
Brother, fear not for me, I must away
To talk with Helen—maybe to unclasp
Her arm from round the neck of Priam's son.
O faithful friends who now so long have fought
For me and my dear right, I pray to Zeus
Your swords be sharp on this wild rainy night!

HELEN AND MENELAUS

Troy. *The house of* Deiphobus. Helen *lying by* Deiphobus *who is asleep.*

HELEN

HOW is it that I cannot sleep tonight?
Behold beside me how Deiphobus
Sleeps well, his hearty day's work being well done,
But I, I am too full of thought to sleep—
I wonder if this carefulness may mar
My shining beauty as the days go on.
Do I grow old? I wonder. Sick and hot
I feel beneath the coverlit of wool—
Better to walk upon the cool hard tiles
And feel the night air cool upon my breast,
That I may sleep at last and wake betimes,
Then help our feast upon the second day
Because the Greeks are gone, and like them too
Shall all hard thoughts be driven from my heart.
(*Goes to window and opens it*)
O cool night! raining, is it? I must feel
(*Stretching out her arm*)
Yea how the drops fall thick upon my arm—

Three hours after midnight, I should think, Helen
And I hear nothing but the quiet rain. and
The Greeks are gone: think now, the Greeks are gone. Menelaus
Never again now shall I hear the cry
Of warder shouting in the Grecian tongue
Borne faint upon the fitful dying wind;
The very warders of the town are still.
O me! tomorrow how the folk will burst
Out at the gates and wonder with great eyes
Staring upon the place where Diomed
Has worn the grass away with his great tent:
How they will walk along the sounding sea
And strain their eyes in looking out for Greece
As even now I strain mine through the dark
Striving to think I see the wooden horse.
Behold the siege is done and I may sit
Holding my eyes and think of what is gone.
Henceforward a new life of quiet days
In this old Town of Troy is now for me.

I shall note it as it goeth past
Quietly as this rain does day by day—
Eld creeping on me; shall I live sometimes
In these old days whereof this is the last,
Yea shall I live sometimes with sweet Paris
In that old happiness 'twixt mirth and tears,
The fitting on of arms and going forth,
The dreadful quiet sitting while they fought,
The kissing when he came back to my arms
And all that I remember like a tale?
O Love, shall I forget thee? doubt it not
That but for minutes I shall nigh forget
What thing thy face was like. Yea even now
I mind but thee and thine growing all dim
But as a well-told tale that brings sweet tears.

I would I could remember, but for me
It shall be always so, and like a dream,

When in the old town eld shall come on me
In quiet days, shall all my beauty be.
Nor shall I much remember or regret,
Gathering the warm robe to my puckered throat,
This red and white smooth skin and tender feet;
But when I eat and drink I shall be glad
And when sweet smells float in upon the wind
In the spring weather, and when music sounds,
I may remember of these other days
And think of Paris for a little while.
(*Enter* Menelaus *stealthily and unarmed*)
They fought to gain me and are gone away
But have not taken off the heavy weight
From my sad heart: Paris my love is dead
(*turning round*)
And I feel waked to live another life.

MENELAUS (*touches her*)
Helen!

HELEN
O God! but am I mad at last?
Who's this?

MENELAUS
Nay hold thy peace or die straightway.
This is my hand that once held yours in it—
Give me a sword—quick, reach across the bed—
Nay, or by Zeus—
(*She reaches out.* Deiphobus *stirs in his sleep*)
Who is it wallows there?
Helen you shall speak to me, but speak low,
Speak in a whisper—yet will I hear your voice—
Nay, you shall answer me or die, Helen
Say who lies there.

HELEN

Deiphobus.

Helen and Menelaus

MENELAUS

The hound—
Give me the sword. Ah so, was that the hilt?
—I tell your fingers by their being soft,
They are no warmer than the shapen brass:
What, your teeth chatter? I must hasten then;
Go to his feet, Helen, and hold them fast—
No knees to me, I say—go to the feet,
This head is mine now. Clasp the feet, Helen;
In the name of God I do myself this right.
(*slays* Deiphobus)
Paris is dead and you are dead also;
This bed hath burned you—ho come forth from it!
(*drags the body out*)

HELEN

Are you the Menelaus that I knew
And scarcely hated once in days gone by,
Or in God's name are you some evil thing
Sent here to drive me mad for all my sins?

MENELAUS

I am the Menelaus that you knew,
Come back to fetch a thing I left behind.
You think me changed: it is ten years ago
And many weary things have happened since.
Behold me lying in my own place now—
(*lying in the bed*)
A-bed, Helen, before the night goes by!

HELEN

I cannot lie there in the blood, my lord—
—I loved it once; yea smite, but slay me out

And not so with your unarmed hand, my lord.
Here give it me, feel here upon my breasts,
Smite so betwixt them with the sword I pray.

MENELAUS
Ah struggle, Helen, nought shall it avail.
Yea but I am the stronger in the wrists:
Feel the steel sword-point cold against your skin
And so lie quiet—ah but you hate me—
—I loved you once—

HELEN
May the Gods pity me
That ever you should love me! Ah that shout!
(*shout from outside*)

[GREEKS] *outside*
The Kings! the Kings! Jove fights for us tonight!

[TROJANS]
Ho Pallas help! out, arm, good people all!
Ho bolts and bars, ho spears and bows to aid!
Ho Pallas Pallas! out, ye thieves of Greece!

MENELAUS
Helen, tonight the Gods have given us Troy;
You will see Greece again.

HELEN
My God, my God,
How happy I was once!

[TROJANS]
Troy! Troy!
To aid, ye sons of Priam!

[GREEKS]
Diomed!
Town won! town won! ho torches to the wood!
Come out ye women! God has sent you dawn

Four hours before the daylight: let us see
What fashion Trojan ladies lie abed.

Helen and Menelaus

[TROJANS]
Ho ho Æneas! Will you see your wives
Dragged naked through the streets? Out, out, ye thieves!

MENELAUS
Come Helen, let us see this play begun;
Soon will they burn the stage itself I trow.
(*at the window*)
There see Æneas with his goodly men
Stand well together—
(*a Trojan shoots at them*)
Ha, an arrow there,
It cut your hair through, Helen, as I think.

HELEN (*weeping*)
O God they hate me!—not without due cause.
I have no help.

[TROJANS]
Come forth Deiphobus!
Come forth and lead us.

MENELAUS
Ah ye shall have him:
Behold this is but as Troy is, ye dogs!
(*thrusts out body: cries from the window*)
Who cometh here? Some shield and sword, Helen.

Shouts. Enter Teucer *and* Pyrrhus *with their arms bloody. A rout of Greeks with them.*

[PYRRHUS]
So Menelaus, wived again! come forth,
A brave jest truly! Well we wrought this night;
These are no beaten hounds I promise you:
Many a brave man has been sped ere this

By tiles and stones from house-tops, and they stand
Right bravely here and there as you shall see.
While Diomedes went to burn and slay
In the common streets, this Teucer here and I
Went round about and shortly here came we
To Priam's palace, burst the rotten gate:
There were the women and the old men crouched
Nigh dead with fear in Phoebus' bright temple;
But at the threshold did old Priam stand,
Unarmed but upright like a brisk young man.
Gods! when I saw the old gray-head traitor,
The thought of my dead father done to death
There in that temple wrought in such a guise
That all my blood seemed fire. I struck out,
Cursing with shut eyes, but my sword knew well
The way it had to go. I slew him there,
And all about we slew them old and young
But some few women. Noted you, Teucer?

TEUCER
Then as their screams rung all about the roof
Came Agamemnon, and he saw a hand
Clutching Apollo's foot from underneath
Some heap of women's raiment; down he stooped
And drew thenceforth Cassandra by the wrists
Who called upon the God in bitter strain.
As pale as privet was she to my eyes
Dark-haired and ox-eyed, tall and strong of limb.
Right many a bitter curse she called on him
And struggled in a mad way without hope.
So Agamemnon bore her off at last
And looking at her I saw not the rest.
(*enter a Messenger*)

[MESSENGER]
Ho haste Sir Knights! Æneas stands at bay
And groweth stronger. Menon is with him

And Helenus the priest. They bar the way,
And to them draw much folk and gather heart.
Needs must ye slay them, if ye will burn Troytown.

Helen and Menelaus

MENELAUS
Take Helen to the ships—Now Sirs go we:
I have but slain one man yet, big though he was.
(*Exeunt*)

CRIES *from without*
Æneas and Antenor for Troytown!

Ho Greeks, why go ye back?

See here,
Is not this Diomed in the front rank? ho!

Lay on now, Trojans, for the life!
To the ships!
Æneas and Antenor—to the ships!—

ONCE MY FELL FOE

ONCE my fell foe worsted me;
All my honour and degree
Were as nothing on that tide.
From the field with woundes wide
Thwart a horse was I conveyed
And in his strong prison laid.
There I lay in prison strong
Many weary months and long,
And no one said good word to me.
There was a window small to see
That let in dear light to me,
With two bars was it made full fast
All unglazed: and the throstles passed
Thereby; singing in the spring
I saw many a fair brown wing
Go thereby: and the weather
How it changed: in what manner
The winds wrought within the tree!
There went the west wind fair and free,
The north wind and the south wind
And the fell east all unkind:
All these things I could espie
If I listed, and notes high
Of fifes heard I many a time,
And of harps the merry rime,
Also I saw the great gate,
And who went by early and late
If I list could I espie.
So somehow the time went by,
Till it chanced on a morn of May
In strong prison as I lay,
I heard many brass horns bray,
And wide the gates were opened.
Then to that I thrust my head
That I might see what thing there came:

Sooth to say I had no shame
If folk might see me staring there,
There was not room for all my hair,
My mouth and nose and eyes scantly
If one came close he might chance to see.
I say the gates were opened,
With horns and shouts there entered
A Lady with a great meinie
Apparelled all most royally.
So when I saw them going there
I waxed ashamed and for my state
I mourned, for there was cloth of gold
And many a guisarme; stiff and bold
In good white armour many a knight
With fair tabard duly dight,
All such things as 'longed once to me—
Yea also and so merrily
Their horns blew, I was constrained
To weep so hard as if it rained
Upon the sill.
But then with these
Between the bright sun and the trees
Came there riding that sweet thing:
At her rein did the bells ring,
Over her saddle of ivory
Fell her fair green gown so free.
Then when I saw her how she rode
A heat struck through my poor cold blood
And I forgot my poor estate,
And well thought I early and late
Will I be her knight perfay.
Thus said I, nor where I lay
Did I remember. What my foe
Would do with me I did not know
As at that time, or if I should win,
God being heavy on my sin.
But for joy of her sweet face

Once my Fell Foe

Once my Fell Foe

This despair I clean forgot,
Nought thought I of this or that
Till she had gone upon her way,
Then half awake longtime I lay—
And if I might again see her.

Within a while I heard a stir,
Round in the lock went the key,
Then came the jailor in to me;
Then spake he loud and merrily:
"Up up, Sir Knight, and leave this place.
My lord hath given you all free grace
That be knights and of good blood
Of those that lie 'twixt stone and wood
In his strong prisons."
Nought did I say
And to and fro did my heart play
Betwixt my doubt and joy that day.
"But what, my lord," said he then,
"Shall I shut this door again?
Love you this place so heartily
You list not leave it?" "Sir," said I,
"I shall sing by and by
And dance for joy, I have no doubt,
That from my prison I am out:
But now my heart misgiveth me
This is a dream." "Drink wine and see,"
Then quoth the carle with high glee;
"I trow strong wine shall make ye see,
For on this day it rains of wine:
Come eat and drink, old prisoner mine!"

Up to the great hall went I then
And there saw I right many men
Wretched and lean with garments rent,
By this great lord they had been shent:
Knights were they once as I had been

But now was their good day gone clean;
Yet that they saw the sun again
And were free now after such pain,
Their lean cheeks waxed red
And with joy their eyes sparkled.
At the dais sat that lord,
Well with cloths was dight the board,
And there was goodly wine and meat,
Thereby had many a lady seat.
And then a herald 'gan to call
With high voice throughout the hall
The style and manner and high degree
Those knights once had that stood with me,
One by one in order fair.
At last heard I as I stood there,
"Ho now for the good knight
That beareth barry black and white,
Sir Robert du Leon well he hight."

Up to the dais went I then
Dizzily walking among men
Who gazed at me curiously.
In some gold dish I did espy
What a wretch I was to see,
My hair unkempt and all dirty,
My visage yellow as honey;
Bare at shoulder and at knee,
An old rent tabard at my back
Where all grey was gone white and black.
Slowly I walked as if with age,
Gaunt and grive of my visage,
I boiled to see how as I went
Over tables the ladies leant
For fear of fouling of their dress.
Such was my grief and my distress
When I knelt before that lord
Mine eyes always I cast down:

Once my Fell Foe

"Sir," quoth he, "once my fair town
You burned with fire, and did to me
Many a foul wrong and injury:
All which I now forgive to thee
In joy that God upon this day
Has given me the fairest may
In all this world to be my wife.
God give you joy now of your life!
Go you and bathe and put on you
Weed of scarlet and of blue,
Then come and eat in this my hall,
The next day go. Take what shall fall
From God, and I shall give to you
Beside this gown of red and blue
Twenty pounds of silver bright
And all that 'longeth to a knight,
Both horse and arms." While thus he said
The blood rose up into my head
And made me dizzy. I thought this:
I am twice beaten; he may kiss
My may upon the lips and take
Her first sweet look when she doth wake
In the merry morning, while I lie
Alone in all my poverty.
Then my heart swelled that nigh I wept,
But yet again my full heart leapt
Up to my mouth with this new thought:
Behold this morning I am brought
An idle show before my may;
It may hap on another day
That I may show her somewhat too.
So thought I and with courage new
Lift up mine eyen and beheld
That may who sat beneath the shield
Of red and blue. So steadily
I thanked him for his clemency
And went away.

When morning came
Out went I with my heart aflame
To do high deeds. The first was I
To ride of all that company;
Out rode I through the flowering trees,
And when I felt between my knees
The plated saddle once again
And heard my horse tread, I was fain
To sing old songs about my may.

You know, Sir Rafe, how day by day
The rumour of me goes: perfay
I shall be rich and great soon—well,
Tomorrow comes and many a selle
Shall empty be of Sienese,
Yet put I not much faith in these
French knights with their glittering—
John Hawkwood hath a bettering.

Once my
Fell Foe

THE LONG LAND

Scene: A place that no one knows.
Enter (in the dust) the Devil. *He says:*

AHA! my dreamer comes through the dust,
His long cloak weighing him down I trust,
I know the heart of this fellow so well,
Soft; he shall think he is in Hell.

THE DREAMER
O misery! utter misery!
I walk and walk, and still to see
The clouds of dust roll over and flee
Before the wind that sweeps by me,
The hot east wind of summer-time;
With such good thoughts as the Devil sends;
For he is a master good, and blends
In a dim grim way, the faces of friends,
Of Mother, Old Land and Love; and lends
Me a long hot land that never ends
And dust clouds that are sun-dried slime.

THE DEVIL
Aha! what think you of shady places?
Lime-shadowed founts, and blended faces,
That start at the splash of the spray of them?
What think you too of the sweeping hem
Of the delicate raiment, soft blue-grey?
Is not the Long Land better than they?

THE DREAMER
A dim voice comes from the heart of the dust
A muttering growl I scarcely trust,
Growling of fire and murder and lust.
Why should I weep who am fast in Hell?
And the folds of my cloak are blown over me

Purple and long; I was wont you see
To admire it much in the days that be
Faint and far-off, and she, ay she
Often pressed it with dainty knee,
As she bent to the wicked head of me
  Her good pure lips I loved so well.

THE DEVIL
O my sweet friend, who were wont to say,
That all men went the self-same way,
Whether they went to it straight like you,
Or by round-about, struggling, puffed and blue;
Till they came to the gate, the spiked gate,
Spiked with the death-darts long and straight:
Tell me I pray if any you see
Who fought in the world like men with me.

THE DREAMER
A dim voice comes from the heart of the dust,
A snarling sneer I dare not trust—
Worse things in the world than murder and lust?
  Ah! once I used to pray.
There was a place too down in the west,
Of all the land she loved it best,
Twixt sea-gulls' hall and thrushes' nest
How sweet it were, O Love, to rest!—
  Alas! all gone away.

THE DEVIL
Yes you were always talking of that—
God's work was it to lie and get fat,
While the others were sweating their brown hides,
Wearily toiling each day that glides,
Wearily earning rank fat and crust,
Dismally drinking, set down in the dust,
Nothing to think of but daily bread:
What does it matter when all are dead?

THE DREAMER

A strange voice out of the heart of the dust
Hissing out lies; I have a faint trust
In the power of Love, O Devil, not lust:
  I could almost pray at last.
—Yea she said, for a while to rest
With languid hands, looking into the west,
Sitting down as a bidden guest
At the feast of the sun; for a while 'twere best
  And how long has that passed.

MARGARET (*in the likeness of an angel*)
  Let me hold his head, O Lord,
    Let me smooth his cheek,
  For he bears a notched sword
    Though his will was weak.

  You shall see how he will lie
    (O! poor forehead, wrinkled now)
  On my breast, how quietly
    I will breathe upon his brow.

  With the whisper of my wings
    I will tell him tales of old,
  I will show him quiet things
    Meet for eyen to behold.

  Nay dear Lord, but see him hold
    Both his wasted arms to me;
  The earth raiment fold on fold
    Clogs him, driven round his knee.

  Therefore, dear Lord, let him lie,
    Wearied head, upon my breast,
  Its faint yellow drapery
    Sweetly scented give him rest,

While I sing and ever sing
  Gentle songs he knew of old
And make pictures in my wing
  Sweet for eyen to behold.

Till his face grow soft and mild
  And the deep lines fade away,
And he look like any child
  Sleeping after noisy play.

Dear Lord, what a child he is!
  He seems never meant to meet
The world's scorn and cruel hiss,
  All the struggle down the street.

Lord, the eyes within my wings,
  I can feel their colours play
With their struggle for these things,
  They so long to be away.

THE DREAMER
Some one surely draweth near—
O! my angel cometh dear,
Is God ready, will he hear?

MARGARET
Nay, speak out and do not fear.

THE DREAMER
Lord thou knowest, none so well
All that I have got to tell,
Little enough too, this in short
That I fought and ever fought,
Many things I overthrew,
So I smiled although I knew
What would come to me at last.
I used to pray it might be past

All that doubtful victory
With the sick smile of the eye
And the sense of failing nigh.
It will be good, I thought, to know
All the worst that must be so.*

. . . . . .

Like a low moon on a cloudy night?
And tell me, am I saved or not;
Sins grow dim and are forgot,
And tell me plainly where is this
This strange long land—Ah Christ! a kiss—
—So now at last I am in bliss.

In Paradise.

MARGARET (*in her proper person*)
You loved green, dear, down below
On the earth; so let us go
To a deep green place I know.

Is this green place enough for thee?
We will sit beneath a tree
And think how happy we shall be.

THE DREAMER
Whisper to me, Margaret
For my ears are dull, forget
Noisy things, aye closer yet.

Tell me all you came to know,
All you found out long ago,
Yes, with hands together so.

* A page of the manuscript missing.

THE ROMANCE OF THE THREE WOOERS

YEARS agone it did befall
By a mouldering brick wall
Three knights strong and lithe and tall
Met as they had sworn to do.
The first knight had a lady's shoe
In his hand, a shoe of gold;
The second had a silken fold
Shredden from a lady's dress;
But the third knight bore a tress
Just the colour of the corn,
From a lady's head 'twas shorn.
The first knight had about his head
A covering of russet red
That wrapped about his helm and crest,
And a red cloth on his breast,
So what his cognisance might be
The others could not lightly see.
The second knight had got no crest
Nor any bearing on his breast,
Plain linen, plain steel only, quite
Without device and only white.
The third knight wore upon his head
Two lilies, one was white, one red,
Likewise on his green surcoat he
Carried a purple-leaved lily.

That wall choked up with weeds and mould
Was the rampart of a castle old
Quite ruined now, but verily
Eld had not caused it so to be,
Indeed petraria-stones you saw
Had crashed through every window and door,
Besides through all the weedy court

Were scattered bones of men that fought
In that grim battle long ago—
Yea man had caused it to be so.
The slope of grass the knights sat on
Covered the bones of those that won
In that grim fight; moreover you
Could see hard by cat-towers two
The victors left behind them there;
They rotted in the autumn air.
An aspen-wood did grow close by
In which the trees hung all awry
Half fallen, yet they could not die,
Though summers since this way they fell,
The other trees propped them so well.

I think you wish to know from me
Something of this strange company,
Then listen: three years ago these three,
Wandering from whose court know I not
Nor from what land, nor know I what
Their friends said to them when they went.
Now these three were at first content
To have adventures such as might
Befall to any errant knight,
Until one morning at the dawn
Each one awaking found a torn
And bloody parchment on his mouth
And all their faces turned round South.
These scrolls were writ in black and red
And the same legend each one said,
"By that which touches either cheek
Go Southward and the Gold Land seek."
—Truly red blood was on each cheek.

Then rose they up with heavy cheer
And bathed them in a fountain near;

They could not wash that stain away,
It drove them onward day by day
Through many unknown lands till they
Heard rumours of a golden land,
And great men bowed at their command.
Joy grew within them when they found
That they would be so well renowned,
Arm linked in arm they would walk now
With straight drawn lips and unmoved brow,
They pitied those they chanced to see
Not being as they a mystery,
And going Southward nearer drew
To the Golden Land, as they well knew.

At last one morn of autumntide,
As thinking high things they did ride,
They came unto an aspen-wood
Where strange things nowise understood
Lay carved in stone their way beside.
A little further did they ride
That morning of late autumntide
And came out in a wide clear space
And there saw midways of that place
The Castle of the Golden Land.
Christ, it was hard to understand:
Each looked the other in the eyes,
Each saw no trace of wild surprise—
No sign of rage nor of distress,
Nothing but mere blank hopelessness.
They sat down on that slope of green
Where lay the dead men's bones between
The soft grass and the inner fire,
They seemed to have no one desire
Not e'en for death, till the eldest knight
Who was yet young—Sir John he hight—
He said, "The bones lie in the court,

But did all die there where they fought,
Did none escape and freely rove?
—Knights, have ye ever been in love?"
They said not nay, they said not yea,
Then said he, "Knights, I have a way
To try if God be wholly bad
To us and we to him—yea sad
It may be in the aftertime—
To us it must be sad—now climb
With me this battered rampart-wall,
Link hands and swear together all."

They stood together, said no word
For many minutes, then a bird
Whose head and legs were yellow, sat
Upon a tower; he looked fat
Because he puffed his feathers so
To screen him, for the wind did blow
Cold and full east—but he was thin:
They thought he looked like a great sin.
Sir John held up his hilt to kiss
Then said, "Now by Christ's cross swear this
That we three different ways will rove,
Search heartily for a true love,
But when three years have passed by
Come here again to live or die;
For whoso loveth happily
Those three years through, the same shall die,
Him and his love, yea verily
If so it happen to us all
Likeways we and our loves shall fall."

They swore with curled lips and straight brow,
The loathly bird that stood just now
Upon the tower-top did shrink
To his right size, croaked, gave one blink

And then let fall his yellow head
On his yellow neck and he was dead.
Natheless his body hung up there
Till all the bones were white and bare.
So when three years had passed away
The knights came as they swore that day
Back to the dismal castle-wall,
And each one to tell his love and all
His victory or defeat and fall.

ST AGNES' CONVENT

ST AGNES' convent by the merry sea
That dashes on the shore of Brittany,
The tower that held our great bell, slim and red,
The deep-sunk fearful moat that the sea fed
Twice in a day; the fair churchyard and good
And therein over all the blessed rood,
Mary and John and soldiers with gilt spears
Stone-grey and moveless through these many years;
The hanging yellow flowers in the Church;
The watching from the walls the perilous lurch
Of the o'erladen dromond as it turned
To enter the glad harbour where there burned
Those three coal fires every windy day;
The strong west wind that drove the summer hay,
Driving my hair too all about my face;
That writing-room, each slim nun at her place
Specking the vellum with the red and black;
Our fireside converse wherein was no lack
Of talk about the world, of such a knight
And how he sped, who was held most bright
Of the court ladies, Arthur's wars and deeds—
Yea I remember setting sunflower seeds
When willow trees were red, I watched them too
When these were grey and waning; just a few
Great bees about me humming all their best
And in that good time every thing had rest—
Gone, gone, Iseult! the happy days of old
Are vanished as a little tale is told:
The gay uprising, the glad lying down
Are gone for ever. To a painful frown
My brows draw when I sleep, for though I fall
Yards, fathoms down in dull dreams, not at all
Do I the less know what I am and what
I want and shall not get; my hands are hot
And moist this wretched day, though the cold wind—

Cold rain—cold air loves well enough to wind
And curl my body like a withered leaf—
This is enough. Moreover, like a thief
Comes creeping through a dark house in the night,
My woe comes on me when I think I might
Be merely wretched with the wind and rain,
But not for any moment will my pain
Grow softer even. Ay turn the mirror, let
Me see Nantes City with its streets afret

St Agnes'
Convent

PALOMYDES' QUEST

ABOUT the middle of the month of June
Sir Palomydes rode upon his quest,
Twixt sunrise and the setting of the moon:
Beast Glatysaunt did give him little rest

At midday, and at midnight must he sleep,
And still the beast trailed on unceasingly
Waking strange echoes in the forest deep,
Leaving strange scales on many a bush or tree.

So the days went and no lovesickness came
O'er the knight's heart to weaken it or bow
His head; he rode on with the same
Set purpose still in his unwrinkled brow.

Until one day when that he rode thinking
Whether the beast as they met face to face
Would turn to fight him with a sudden spring,
Or creep away and whine in some dark place

Until he bound his jaws and led him out—
And then he thought until his heart grew hot
Of how the folk would laugh and sing and shout
As he should lead the beast through Camelot,

The heralds crying, "Ho good people, see!
For this is Palomydes the good knight
Who hath achieved his quest most gloriously
And won the Questing Beast in open fight!"

Thereat in sooth he almost seemed to be
There in the streets with all the bells ringing
And all the folk at window him to see,
Damsels and minstrels ready for to sing.

Almost he heard the praises of the King
And Launcelot saying "Now beyond all doubt
Is Palomydes the best knight living
Though Lamorak and Tristram are most stout."

Abroad from thence the bruit shall go of me,
And many a lord shall say, "Hold we high feast;
Tomorrow an uncouth sight shall we see:
Here cometh Palomydes and his beast."

And so to Cornwall shall I come at last—
But saying this he sighed, for well he thought:
When all this noble fame has been compassed
Shall Iseult's love be nearer to me brought?

Now at that time the forest thinner grew
On the left hand, and all between the trees
The light of the green fields began to show,
And ever fresher blew the western breeze,

On either side of him the thrushes sang
And as he drew his rein it seemed to him
That from some far-off tower the bells rang.
So he passed on to that great forest's rim

And then beneath him by the meadows fair
With their broad acres of the good green wheat
Starred with the blood-red poppies burning clear,
There sat he, and the smell of hay came sweet

Upon the wind and therewithal the chimes
Uncertain as the kisses of a maid
Sang out their tale in sweet outlandish rymes
Hard to remember. Therefore down he laid

His bridle, and he cried, How fair, how fair,
You walk within the summer gardens [ ]
O bright Iseult!—having but little care
For Palomydes, as I full well know.

BALLAD

THERE were two knights rode together,
At their backs a great meiné
They were in the fair English land,
Muckle joy had they.

Fair Sir, I am old and my eyen are weak,
Your eyen are clear and keen,
I pray you name me well yon bird
Fled over the meadows green.

Whether was it a good storm-thrush
Or a jay with a blue wing,
Was it one of the birds that sing fair lauds
When the greves are green in spring?

Yon bird it was no missel-thrush
Or jay with a blue wing;
O let harrow and well away
To the song that it doth sing.

Yon was an evil maggot-pie,
He bodeth us treie and tene,
I would I had seen some other bird
Betwixt the greves green.

Though we have come safe home again
And our hap has been but good,
Cry not Ho, the old saw saith,
Till you are out of the wood.

They rode so long till the mirk night
Came over the country side;
They said one to another,
I would some house might betide.

O whatten a light is yon great light
That maketh the heaven red?
It is na the light of torches
For all men are fast abed.

O whatten a light is yon great light?
The sun was down six hours ago.
No doubt in some carle's homestead
The red cock doth crow.

O whatten a light is yon great light?
The moon was down an hour ago.
O yon is the bonny house of Skreehope
That burneth all in a red low.

O whatten staves are yon great staves?
They seem right great agen the low.
O yon are the spears of the fause Scots:
Cry, Mary my help for Skreehope ho!

Gin we had no fear of the French glaives
Little fear have we of the Scotch spears.
I should never see such a deadly fray
Gin I should live an hundred years.

Many a Scot was overthrown
And laid dead on the earth cold,
But our Englishmen were put aback
Though of their hearts they were full bold.

There was the lord of Skreehope slain,
And Sir John of Fulton was led away.
Skreehope House has been full cold,
None dwells there syne that day.

WE HAVE DONE ALL THAT MEN COULD DO

WE have done all that men could do
But lie here in the dust at last,
For ye were many, we were few,
Our battles and our lives are past.

Fear nothing then but strike the blow;
Be merry now from day to day—
Your enemies are lying low,
Fear not the Gods so far away.

What can our curses now avail,
We lying here unarmed and bound,
If prayers were nought to turn the scale
When swords were whole and mail was sound?

Ye shall grow great: your old defeat
Shall be but part of your renown—
O brave, so many a loss to meet
And still to rise when smitten down!

SAINT GEORGE

SUCH careless thoughts as maids will have, she had
In other days, when passing on that way
Toward the small chapel: there with heart right glad,
Because joy filled her, would she often pray.

Indeed I know in those days there was nought
That Sabra needed: so for utter love
She prayed: nor broke thereby one happy thought
That pleased her heart, pure as a grey-winged dove.

But now she thought it hard to think of God;
Although her lips kept muttering as she went,
"God help! Christ help!" Her footsteps as she went
Seemed heavy to her, and her head was bent

Down to the road. That morning she would walk,
Although they brought a litter hung with gold
And soft with cushions; when she heard them talk
Low-voiced why these were black—"nay on the mould

I walk a ghost," she said, "on this last day."
Although of old for very daintiness
She loved soft cushions and fine food, this may
Went golden-shod afoot in her distress.

Her head down to the ground a little drooped,
Her loose hair combed out thin on either side,
Beneath a scarlet mantle furred she stooped,
A thin white kirtle clad her like a bride.

There were no women with her; but tall men
This side and that plodded with heavy tread:
Armed close and clean with steel they were, as when
In bitter fight the guisarme skins the head

TWAS IN CHURCH ON PALM SUNDAY

TWAS in Church on Palm Sunday
Listening what the priest did say
Of the kiss that did betray,

That the thought did come to me
How the olives used to be
Growing in Gethsemane:

That the thoughts upon me came
Of the lantern's steady flame,
Of the softly whispered name,

Of how kiss and words did sound
When the olives stood around,
While the robe lay on the ground.

Then the words the Lord did speak,
And that kiss in Holy Week
Dreams of many a kiss did make:

Lover's kiss beneath the moon—
With it sorrow cometh soon,
Juliet's within the tomb,

Angelico's in quiet light,
Mid the aureoles very bright
God is looking from the height.

There the monk his love doth meet:
Once he fell before her feet
Ere within the Abbey sweet

He, while music rose alway
From the Church, to God did pray
That his life might pass away.

Twas in Church on Palm Sunday

There between the angel rows
With the light flame on his brows,
With his friend, the deacon goes:

Hand in hand they go together,
Loving hearts they go together
Where the Presence shineth ever.

Kiss upon the death-bed given,
Kiss on dying forehead given
When the soul goes up to Heaven.

Many thoughts beneath the sun
Thought together: Life is done,
Yet for ever love doth run.

Willow standing 'gainst the blue
Where the light clouds come and go,
Mindeth me of kiss untrue.

Christ thine awful cross is thrown
Round the whole world, and thy Sun
Woful kisses looks upon.

Eastward slope the shadows now,
Very light the wind does blow,
Scarce it lifts the laurels low;

I cannot say the things I would,
I cannot think the things I would,
How the Cross at evening stood.

Very blue the sky above,
Very sweet the faint clouds move,
Yet I cannot think of love.

BLANCHE

BROAD leaves that I do not know
Grow upon the leaves* full low
Over them the wind does blow.

Hemlock leaves I know full well,
And about me is the smell
That doth in the spring woods dwell.

And the finch sings cheerily,
And the wren sings merrily,
But the lark sings trancedly.

Silv'ry birch-trunks rise in air
And beneath the birch-tree there
Grows a yellow flower fair.

Many flowers grow around
And about me is the sound
Of the dead leaves on the ground.

Yea, I fell asleep last night
When the moon at her full height
Was a lovely, lovely sight.

I have had a troubled dream,
As I lay there in the beam
Of the moon a sudden gleam

Of a white dress shot by me,
Yea, the white dress frighted me
Flitting by the aspen tree.

Suddenly it turned round,
With a weary moaning sound
Lay the white dress on the ground.

*See Life I, 58, where Mr. Mackail suggests some word like "ground" for "leaves." Another suggestion would be to alter "upon" to "among."

There she knelt upon her knees
There, between the aspen trees,
O! the dream right dreary is.

With her sweet face turned to me
Low she moaned unto me
That she might forgiven be.

O! my lost love moaned there,
And her low moans in the air
Sleepy startled birds did hear.

O! my dream it makes me weep,
That drear dream I had in sleep
At the thought my pulses leap;

For she lay there moaning low
While the solemn wind did sough
While the clouds did over go.

Then I lifted up her head
And I softly to her said,
Blanche, we twain will soon be dead.

Let us pray that we may die,
Let us pray that we may lie
Where the softening wind does sigh,

That in heaven amid the bliss
Of the blessed where God is
Mid the angels we may kiss;

We may stand with joined hands
Face to face with angel bands:
They too stand with joined hands.

Yea, she said, but kiss me now
Ere my sinning spirit go
To the place no man doth know.

There I kissed her as she lay,
O! her spirit passed away;
Mid the flowers her body lay.

What a dream is this of mine:
I am almost like to pine
For this dreary dream of mine.

O dead love, thy hand is here,
O dead Blanche, thy golden hair
Lies along the flowers fair.

I am all aweary love
Of the bright blue sky above,
I will lie beside thee love.

So over them, over them ever
The long, long wind swept on,
And lovingly, lovingly ever
The birds sang on their song.

WINTER WEATHER

WE rode together
In the winter weather
To the broad mead under the hill;
Though the skies did shiver
With the cold, the river
Ran, and was never still.

No cloud did darken
The night; we did hearken
The hound's bark far away.
It was solemn midnight
In that dread, dread night
In the years that have passed for aye.

Two rode beside me,
My banner did hide me
As it drooped adown from my lance;
With its deep blue trapping,
The mail over-lapping,
My gallant horse did prance.

So ever together
In the sparkling weather
Moved my banner and lance;
And its laurel trapping,
The steel over-lapping,
The stars saw quiver and dance.

We met together
In the winter weather
By the town-walls under the hill;
His mail-rings came clinking,
They broke on my thinking,
For the night was hush'd and still.

Two rode beside him,
His banner did hide him,
  As it drooped down strait from his lance;
With its blood-red trapping,
The mail over-lapping,
  His mighty horse did prance.

And ever together
In the solemn weather
  Moved his banner and lance;
And the holly trapping,
The steel over-lapping,
  Did shimmer and shiver, and dance.

Back reined the squires
Till they saw the spires
  Over the city wall;
Ten fathoms between us
No dames could have seen us
  Tilt from the city wall.

There we sat upright
Till the full midnight
  Should be told from the city chimes;
Sharp from the towers
Leapt forth the showers
  Of the many clanging rhymes.

'Twas the midnight hour,
Deep from the tower
  Boom'd the following bell;
Down go our lances,
Shout for the lances!
  The last toll was his knell.

There he lay, dying;
He had, for his lying,
  A spear in his traitorous mouth;
A false tale made he
Of my true true lady;
  But the spear went through his mouth.

In the winter weather
We rode back together
  From the broad mead under the hill;
And the cock sung his warning
As it grew toward morning,
  But the far-off hound was still.

Black grew his tower
As we rode down lower,
  Black from the barren hill;
And our horses strode
Up the winding road
  To the gateway dim and still.

At the gate of his tower,
In the quiet hour,
  We laid his body there;
But his helmet broken,
We took as a token;
  Shout for my lady fair!

We rode back together
In the winter weather
  From the broad mead under the hill;
No cloud did darken
The night; we did hearken
  How the hound bay'd from the hill.

POEMS OF THE EARTHLY PARADISE
TIME (About 1865-1870)

THE WANDERERS

[THE FIRST PROLOGUE TO THE EARTHLY PARADISE]

OHO! oho! whence come ye, Sirs,
Drifted to usward in such guise,
In ship unfit for mariners,
Such heavy sorrow in your eyes?

THE WANDERERS:
O masters of this outland shore,
When first we hoisted up our sail
We were all furnished with good store
Of swords and spears and gilded mail:

Yea then, of minstrels, many an one
Stood on the deck with harp in hand,
And many a dame bright as the sun
Cried farewell to us from the land.

See now our hair as white as snow
On head and cheek, and chin and lip;
Smooth men we were when long ago
We drew the gangway to the ship.

A summer cruise we went that tide
To take of merchants toll and tax;
Out from our tops there floated wide
The Lion with the Golden Axe.

Five ships we were; the Fighting Man
That bore our chiefest in command,
The Boar, the Bear, the Gold-crowned Swan,
And we last in the Rose Garland.

Ah, must we tell our tale again
This once! and still we pray you, Sirs,
Once only now! So had we fain
Forget it for these last few years

We walk about above the ground.
In few words—that time as I say
We swept both narrow seas and sound
Of all the ships that came our way.

Our holds were full of bales of goods
Worth many a florin, so perdie
Homeward we turned, counting the roods
Of land we should buy presently.

Alas! the slip 'twixt lip and cup:
For on a time, as it befell
We wanted water, so brought up
Within a bay we knew full well.

There, when the hawsers were made fast
Ashore we went, feast did we keep,
Then filled our water-casks; at last
There in our tents we fell asleep.

But as it drew to the twilight
In the grey dawn, we heard a shout
Come from the captain's tent: forthright
From the fringed doorway he came out.

Straight ran we to him: "Have no fear
Fellows," he said; "from a strange dream,
Or something more, as ye shall hear,
Have I just waked; thus did it seem:

I stood upon a certain land
Hard by the sea, a white city
Above; a sea-beat yellow strand
Furrowed by keels was under me.

And as I stood, it seemed, perdie!
A yellow lion was I grown;
Of you some forty were with me,
Each as a lion with a crown

Each one of us a great axe had
In his right paw; and blithe we seemed
And thereat nothing mazed or sad:
And furthermore, fellows, I dreamed

That folk kept passing to and fro
Nor saw us: all were fair and young,
Laughing and merry did they go,
And many were the songs they sung.

Forth to the city then we went,
The fairest houses there we saw
With walls about green gardens bent,
And in the midst, without a flaw

Rose up a temple of green stone
Like glass: therein were images
As of Diana, burd-alone,
Trim-shod, with dainty naked knees.

Jupiter saw I, furthermore,
Without a frown upon his face:
And Pallas with her book of lore
Set in a corner of the place.

There was the Ruler of the Sea,
And Juno still in wrathful mood,
Bacchus we saw, and Mercury;
With downcast eyes there Pluto stood.

And midmost there, with wings that met
Over his head, was mighty Love,
And there beside was Venus set,
Fresh, soft, and naked, with her dove

Brushing his wings against her feet.
Now in this temple, Sirs, I say,
I dreamed I saw two fellows meet
And talk together such a way:

The Wanderers

'Ah!' said the first, 'if folk but knew
The merry days we live in here,
No longer should we be a few,
Full many a keel would hither steer.'

'Yea' quoth the other, 'did they know
That every man grows young again
That underneath our gates doth go,
And never after suffers pain;

No war, no winter, no disease,
No storm nor famine reach us here,
Ever we live 'mid rest and ease
And no man doth another fear!'

When this I heard, so loud my heart
'Gan beat that scarce I heard one say:
'But far this sweet land is apart
From all the world! Yet is the way

Not altogether hard to find
It still you steer west hardily
Beseeching Venus to be kind.'
This said, they passed on presently.

No longer was I lion then,
But man again, old, near my death,
And ye were gone, as oft to men
In helpless dreams it happeneth.

* Kneeling to Venus (big)

Down fell I straight upon my knees,
And holding Venus by the feet,
'I pray thee give me rest and peace
And fearless life, my lady sweet,'

* These notes are written in the manuscript on the back of the previous leaf opposite the verse selected. They are suggestions for the illustrations to be made by Burne-Jones.

Said I, and therewithal I wept;
  Nearer and nearer to my death
I grew, yet still my hands I kept
  Upon the image, with weak breath

Muttering out prayers; till suddenly
  As happed once to Pygmalion
So dreamed I that it happed to me;
  The stone my hands were laid upon

Grew into soft flesh, the fair leg
  Drew back a little as she said,
'My knight, I grant you that you beg,'
  And laid her hands upon my head.

Then shuddering my head I bent
  Before the Goddess, with shut eyes,
As through my veins the new blood went
  Filling my heart with ecstasies

Forgotten long; within a while
  I raised my eyes and looked and there
Still stood the image with set smile
  And colourless with gilded hair.

Then suddenly aware I was
  All was a dream; yet woke I not
But passed from out that house of glass,
  And went again to that same spot

Where first I found myself, and then
  I woke indeed, but, fellows mine,
Waking, I saw two ancient men
  There in the corners; of gold fine

One wore a crown; about his head
  Shone rings of light, all armed was he
And all his raiment was of red;
  He held a great axe handily.

The other man was clad in blue
One-eyed he was and held a spear:
Olaf and Odin straight I knew
And cried the cry that you did hear.

Straightway they vanished, but each one
Beckoned me westward as he went;
Then to the tent I heard you run—
Say, fellows, what these wonders meant."

All waited till the mass-priest said:
"The Devil well such dreams might send,
When one lay helpless on his bed,
To tempt a man to evil end."

Such things were possible to be
He doubted not, a little while,
"Hell-fire afterwards," said he;
I broke in with a certain smile,

"Yea also here St Olaf came."
He said, "The Devil, oh my son,
Having no body but a flame
Can just as well be two as one,

Olaf as Odin for the nonce,"
Said John our mass-priest, "yea, and know
I heard a tale of men who once
Sought for this land ye seek of now,

And to some isle far in the West
Outside the world they came one day
And there they went ashore to rest
But as upon the grass they lay

Devils set on them and to shreds
Tore many, but some got away
And years thereafter with white heads
Came broken-hearted to Norway."

When he had done Sir Rolf the Old
Next said: "Captain, it seems to me
You plan a voyage overbold—
Now such a thing as this might be

If we were sitting poor at home—
But I am rich and old and bent
And think no more at last to roam.
I think, that westward if ye went,

Many a strange thing might ye see
Nor yet come home again, or live
More than a month or two; for me
At home henceforth I think to thrive."

"Yea too," quoth one, "the western seas
Are all alive with fearful things,
Great rolling waves without a breeze
And wingless birds and fish with wings."

Then I hot-headed and aflame
To seek new things, at such-like words
Cried, "In that place from whence you came
Do folk perchance sell spears and swords?

Or by the loom do men there sit
Watching the women's shuttle fly
From side to side, not touching it
With any finger? Do they die

And of that great renown think nought
Our fathers won in other days
Who over strange seas strange things sought,
Nor bore to die with little praise?

Let whoso will of these go home
And sit there while the minstrels sing
Great lies about him, the beer-foam
Still on their beards, and sea-roving

In words alone: but we will go
Follow our fortunes to the West,
And leave the winter and the snow
And gain all things that men love best."

The young men shouted thereupon;
For through their hearts the thoughts did pass,
Warm days, ripe fruit, the merry sun,
And sweet fair ladies on the grass,

Or cinnamon-fires burning bright
In the cool autumn evening,
And gold-gowns fairer to the sight
Than raiment of the Greekish king.

But there were old men there, and men
Not old, but fain enow to live
Without risk three score years and ten
With what delights that land could give;

So there rose up a murmuring
And earnest talk 'twixt man and man;
There was said many a foolish thing—
Yea, some of us indeed began

Within our sheaths to loose the swords,
Until the Captain cried at last,
"O fellows, you have heard my words,
Nor do I bid you on this cast

To venture all but if your hearts
Are firm thereon as mine today,
Then let those go who for their parts
Would still live on in their old way."

Then with his sword he drew a line
Deep in the sand and said, "Fellows,
Whoso from henceforth will be mine
To sail in seas no shipman knows."

Two hundred of us followed him— The Wanderers
The Captain said: "Good fellows mine,
Sell me two ships for these my men
And for our gold and cloth your wine,

Stockfish and salt-meat; and farewell,
God prosper all things to your hand."
"Which," said they, "would you have us sell?"
"The Fighting Man and Rose Garland,"

Said he. So all was straightway done,
And each man happy thought himself
As we went westward with the sun
And they sailed eastward with their pelf.

Alas! we left that merry shore, The Ships splitting (big)
And never to come back again,
And never see our own folk more,
And suffer many and many a pain.

FOR twenty days we sailed away,
Due west past many lands we knew,
Till at the last before us lay
Stretched out, the landless sea and blue.

Still west we went, till the north-wind *Edward on his galley at Sluse (big)
Came on us, amid clouds and rain;
And so no longer could we find
Our true course, therefore were we fain

To strike sail, as we drove before
The wind that yet kept rising till
We thought we ne'er should see the shore
In life again, for good or ill.

*It will be noticed that this incident does not occur in the poem here, though it is referred to later on. It was evidently to be added on revision, and is happily preserved in the published Prologue.

Till as it happed the great wind fell
Even at its highest, and that past
We rode becalmed, and in the swell
Dipping our yard-arms; then at last

We saw stars, and as the wind
Rose light and fair, we steered north-west:
Then was the weather sweet and kind
As unto sailors at the best.

So passed ten days and it grew warm,
And warmer ever as we sailed;
And no man yet had come to harm
Spite of the storm. Now the wind failed

One evening just as the night fell,
And rose again about midnight,
And blew till morning fair and well,
Then saw we land as it grew light.

A long green coast dipped in the sea,
A wall of trees behind there was,
Under our ship's sides certainly
Clear showed the water green as glass.

Ah, how we sang and shouted then!
Never before such joy we had,
We were the happiest of all men,
Never again could we be sad.

Most grievous of all times is this
For wretches to remember now,
We thought then, Here begins our bliss—
Alas! for then began sorrow:

For ever as we coasted there
The fair young folk we looked to see
Our fellow dreamed of, and the fair
Long yellow beach and white city:

But we saw nought but trees and grass
And thereupon wild things playing
Around the sea as green as glass
And fish with many a scarlet ring.

Then doubting drew we near to land
With fainter hearts than heretofore;
With iron chain and hempen band
We made the ships fast to the shore.

Then said the Captain: "Good fellows,
This is a right fair land to see,
Deep grass, sweet streams and trees in rows,
And birds singing in every tree.

And yet no sign of man there is;
How good the sweet land of my dream
Must be, when such a land as this
Is left untilled of any team,

Without a man or house thereon!"
"Yet inland, Captain, let us go
And seek thereafter," called out one,
"And sail at last if it be so

There are no folk. A grievous thing
It would be to sail back again
A year hence for this land seeking;
And well it might be then in vain."

Yea, said we all, so it shall be,
And chose by lot nine of our men,
And sent them out by three and three
Well armed and victualled; said we then:

"A month here do we wait for you
Then sail away whate'er betide,
But that ye light on something new."
This done we built our camp beside

That warm sea, and there many a day
We swam among the purple fish
And sported there in every way
That any man could think or wish.

Or in the woods went wandering
And lay beneath outlandish trees,
Heard strange new birds new carols sing
And thought of coming voyages.

Moreover there we held great feasts
Because the place was furnished well
With deer and goats and such like beasts
Whereof full many a head there fell;

Thereof also we made good store
Of salt meat for our voyages.
So passed the month along the shore
Nor saw we ought of those same threes.

Until one day, the time being past
We hauled the ships down to the sea
And broke the camp up, then at last
Three men came running hastily.

Far had they gone, but nothing seen
But trees and meadows fair enough,
And such beasts as with us had been.
No lion or bear, and nothing rough,

Hurtful or evil did they see,
Nothing but still the quiet land,
But of all fruits right great plenty
Whereof they carried some in hand.

A great river they came unto
And went along its bank, until
On the fifth day they saw it go
Into a cavern in a hill

With a great roar, as well might be.
  Then up that hill they clomb and thence
Looked landward but did nothing see
  But trees and meads until a fence

Of mountains rose against the sky.
  They went thereto for three days more.
Then clomb the mountains easily;
  Thence seaward could they see the shore,

Landward a fairer place than all
  They yet had seen, a fair green plain
With trees and streams, yet like a wall
  Far off the mountains rose again.

Therefore they crossed the plain, but when
  They reached the top of this third range,
And saw no signs of any men
  And saw the land with little change

Spread out beneath them as before,
  They thought it good to turn straightway
Back to the ships. So to the shore
  They came upon the thirtieth day.

"Fellows," they said, "the land is good,
  Nor is there anything to fear.
We are the first that have spilled blood
  Even of beasts; none dwelleth here."

But as they spoke a certain one
  Came towards us between bush and bush
Out from the forest to the sun,
  Holding a basket made of rush.

Thereto his hair was white as snow
  And bent he walked as if with pain,
Yet as he neared us, did we know
  Our fellow John the Long again

Who went from us both young and fair
And merry-hearted, a stout man,
Broad-shouldered and with yellow hair:
Half-dead he stood there bent and wan.

We pressed around him, but he said
No word, but stooping opened wide
The rushen basket, then as dead
Our hearts grew, when we saw inside

The heads of our two fellows lie
Bloody and cut off at the neck;
Then straight some cried out angrily
To have him forthwith to the deck

Of the chief ship and judge him there;
Some clashed their axes o'er his head;
But then beholding his white hair
And that he stood like one long dead,

Upright, but looking at nothing,
Their clamour died out suddenly.
For in our ears the words did ring
The priest spoke, of the isles that lie

Outside the world where devils be.
We thought, our fellows have been slain
And damned perchance most piteously,
And this one has been raised again

And sent to frighten us to death—
And little of that did it fail:
We stood scarce daring to draw breath
Or look around us, while the sail

Kept flapping in the rising wind,
And the noon sun was shining fair,
Till this thought came into my mind,
What if the night should find us here?

Then gasping to the ship I ran
And straight the others followed me
As sheep their leader, till no man
Was on the shore but only he.

No heed at all he seemed to take
As we the hawsers cut, and as
Some way the ships began to make
Leaving that land of trees and grass

Inhabited by fiends of Hell;
Nor did we ever after know
What things the other three befell
That erewhile with the rest did go.

Three days we sailed that land along
Ever with hearts right sore afraid
Till from the land the wind blew strong
And so the open sea we made.

This was the first day of those days
When we were sorry we had come
Far off from the green land-locked bays
And white-wood houses of our home.

But whitherward now should we steer,
What star should lead us now thereto?
Yea though our hearts should die with fear
No way but onward could we go.

Yea call it onward if you will:
Whereto the wind blew there went we,
There was no use for strength or skill,
We were as boys blown out to sea.

WESTWARD so far as we could tell
With a fair wind twelve days we sailed,
And nothing evil us befell;
Till as before the sea-breeze failed

At night-fall, therefore watch and ward
We kept with little sleep that night;
The low land, covered with green sward
We saw at the first streak of light.

Above, the tall trees as before,
And all about, the goats and deer
Playing together on the shore—
Masters, then sunk our hearts with fear.

To leave that evil land behind
Twelve days to sail upon the sea
Before the merry Eastern wind
And still in the same place to be

As to our eyes it verily seemed:
Almost we thought to see laid there
Our fellow's body—had we dreamed
At sight of that still land so fair

Those evil things that there befell,
Or was there such another place
Inhabited by fiends from Hell
And otherwise in goodly case?

Now as the wind blew on the land
A furlong from the land we rode,
An anchor out on either hand;
And many an evil we forbode.

This happed: about the dead of night
The watch gave warning, and we all
Looked landward, and saw many a light
Pass to and fro, and therewithal

Strange cries we heard come from the shore,
And still the lights came one by one,
And kept increasing more and more
Until the rising of the sun.

But in the twilight we saw there
A multitude of moving things
Black on the green shore: many a prayer
We muttered hearing their cryings.

We said, we sought for Heaven on earth
But now at last have come to Hell;
These things that make such sort of mirth
With these for ever shall we dwell.

Alas the merry merchant-town,
Alas the farms at home, we said,
The crossed tombs on the grassy down
Around the church when we [ ] dead.

But now hereafter shall they say
To those that in our houses dwell,
Forgetting God they sailed away
And drove into the mouth of Hell.

Yet God was good to us, fair Sirs;
As day-light spread we looked to see
Uncertain forms of great monsters,
And soon within their grip to be;

Nevertheless as the day rose
With fainting hearts we armed us clean
And saw the faces of our foes,
Such folk as we had often seen;

Black men such as our people bring
With ivory and spices rare,
When southward they go sea-roving,
Or like the Greek kings' eunuchs are.

They offered battle by their guise,
As crowding on the grassy strand
They hailed us with outlandish cries
And shook their weapons in their hand.

Right ugly staves they had with them
Set round with many a spiky bone,
Skin coats with gaudy painted hem,
And axes evil made of stone.

And bows they had but weak enough,
They had no raiment of defence
But furry skins, and targets rough;
They had no boat to come from thence.

Therefore our hearts again grew light
And little heeded we their noise,
But that it stirred in us forthright
Remembrance of old battle joys.

And loud the Captain shouted: "Sirs
Here is a good game to your hand!
Ye are no merchant mariners
To buy and sell from land to land.

Up anchors, man the oars forthright,
Get ready axes to the hand;
Blow horns, for we shall hear ere night
New tidings of our promised Land!"

Joyous our hearts grew and merry;
We cried our cries, while overhead
Out went the banner suddenly,
And down the wind went long and red.

Out ran the forty oars like one,
While from the stern the minstrel men
Struck up *The King of England's Son.*
Forgotten were our troubles then,

As towards the shore we drove, singing,
Amid the stones and sharp arrows—
We counted that a little thing,
So fain we were to come to blows.

There in their midst ashore we leapt,
And great and grim the slaughter was,
In their skin coats their bodies kept,
The great stone axes broke like glass.

There on the shore in heap on heap
They fell upon the trodden grass,
Or from the beach they fled like sheep
By such wild ways as they might pass,

And these we followed after straight,
But left behind some fifty there,
To guard our passage, if ill fate
Betid, for still we feared a snare.

But nought within the woods that day
We saw but dying men and dead,
They had no rede, but, get away,
These strangers may not be bested.

So on we pressed till at noontide
We came unto a clearer space
Where stood their town, and therebeside
A little river ran apace.

A poor place built of reeds and wood
And no man there to make defence;
Ajar the gates of wattle stood,
Both men and women had gone thence.

Natheless their beasts were left behind,
And, namely, pigs and beasts like goats
But bigger far than are our kind;
And geese swam all about their moats.

But iron or silver, brass or gold
Nor any metal, found we there,
But stout staves certain flints did hold
Brought to a sharp edge and a fair.

And nothing woven there we found
For all their raiment was of skin,
And pots but neither glazed or round
We saw with evil drink therein.

And in the midst we saw a hall
Wherein their filthy God they keep,
Who had on him, for royal pall,
The skins of some beast like a sheep,

Set round with many a coloured shell.
So there our helmets we did off,
And on their swine we feasted well
Then burnt their God with jeer and scoff.

Thereafter all the place we burned,
Then got together some poor spoil,
And back toward our ships returned
At undern. Now with care and toil

Had we come through the woods before;
Much more we laboured coming back,
Driving our cattle us before;
Nought was it now but hew and hack

And stumble; till the night-fall came
And found us still deep in the woods
Forewearied with our arms, foot-lame,
And scattered shepherding our goods.

Therefore we made a barrier,
Wherein we laid us down to sleep
And wait; nor had we any fear
Of miscreants and such Devil's sheep.

But in the dead of night I woke,
And heard a sharp and bitter cry,
And there saw, struck with a great stroke,
Lie dead, Sir John of Hederby.

We armed us with what speed we might,
As thick and fast the arrows came,
Nor did we any more lack light,
For all the woods were red with flame.

Straight we set forward valiantly
While all about the blacks lay hid,
Who never spared to yell and cry—
A woful night to us befell.

For some within the fire fell,
And some with shafts were smitten dead,
Neither could any see right well
Which side to guard, nor by my head

Did we strike stroke at all that night,
For ever onward as we drew
So drew they back from out our sight;
Thus we went on as men might do

In evil dreams, until we felt
The sea-breeze push the smoke away,
And of the sea the savour smelt
Sweeter than roses by my fay!

Now when we were all met, some bade
To turn again and smite these thieves,
Yet were the more part now afraid
Nor list to die like shrivelled leaves.

Soon we should all be more than kings,
Nor was there anything to gain
From these but hogs and such-like things,
And folly was it to be slain

Upon the eve of Paradise.
Therefore we put again to sea
Leaving a land that might entice
More wary travellers than we.

Ships sailing (small)

We coasted by cape after cape
Until the wind blew easterly,
Then due west we our course did shape,
Withal was but a gentle sea.

Our hearts upon the end were set
As fair we sailed before the wind,
All things behind did we forget
In sweet hope happy life to find.

The third day came Sir Nicholas,
Our Captain, to the Rose Garland.
And coming up to where I was,
Spoke to me, holding up his hand:

"Sir Rafe, I deem you wise and true
Nor given unto babbling words,
Which spoken we may not undo
And make worse wounds than grinded swords.

Now I am heavy in my heart,
And all my hope is fallen to nought,
Fain would I you should have a part
Of this my burden: I am brought

Night after night in lifelike dreams
To that land where we wish to go;
Alas none ever happy seems
Of all the folk I meet there now.

And tombs are in the fair church set,
No man adores the Goddesses,
The palace steps with blood are wet,
And weeds grow up between the trees.

Last night I saw my father there,
My mother whom I left alive
In Norway, and my daughter fair,
No one of them did seem to thrive.

At last this question came from me,
That long unto my tongue did cling:
'Do folk die here?' Then piteously
They answered me with sore weeping.

'Alas! fair son,' my father said,
'None comes to this unhappy place
Unless for ever they are dead;'
And therewith he lift up his face.

O, well do I remember, Rafe,
My father, when from sea we came,
And thought to see our homestead safe,
And saw, instead, its last thin flame

Die out above my dead mother;
His face was not so wretched then
As that the shade did show me there—
O, Rafe, we are but ruined men!

A dream has sent us on this quest,
And certain half-forgotten tales:
To live for ever is the best
That haps to us; but if all fails

What is the worst of all?" Said I,
"It is well seen, friend, by my head,
We shall find some good way to die;
Then are we, as our fathers, dead,

Who fell upon the English shore,
Or sunk below the sandy Seine,
Or back from Russia came no more,
Or got no mercy from the Dane.

Yea, also, ere we come to this
Doubt not that we shall find some way
To pass our life in worldly bliss
In some sweet isle with game and play.

And shall we now curse God and die
If following some minstrels' dream,
As boys a painted butterfly,
We find it lead us down the stream

Of circumstance, to a strange life
Wherein more wonders we shall see
Than if we lived at home in strife
Thirty men's lives, as men now be?

I say a dream has brought us here,
Let us now go where it may lead,
For no dream shall we ever steer
Back eastward, Captain, by my rede.

Yea, are we now as like to find
This very Earthly Paradise,
As any land I bear in mind.
Needs must we on in any wise—

Or will the wind that ever blew
From some point east, as we came here,
Be unto us so leal and true
As back at our command to steer?"

"I would the wind would rise," said he,
"And blow us to some Christian shore
Through howsoever wild a sea,
Thence would I never wander more.

There should we find some fair abbey
Where long in penance should I dwell
And ever to the great God pray,
And say my psalter fair and well.

For now have we sinned Adam's sin,
To make us Gods who are but men,
To find a heaven and dwell therein
Whose years are but three score and ten.

Yea, almost are we fain to have
  Such Gods as we ourselves have made,
For if they be not strong to save
  Of them is no man much afraid.

This is the thing I fear therefore,
  That we our journey end too well,
And reach the much desired shore,
  And without dying come to Hell.

I pray rather that God may stay
  Our ship in the mid-ocean now,
Until our flesh fall all away;
  Or else that some great wind may blow,

And drive us underneath the sea—
  There shall [ ] do what seemeth best
Unto our bodies, that shall be
  Until the Day of Doom at rest."

Now even as he spake to me,
  Dead fell the wind, the sails did flap,
And all our way stopped suddenly,
  Just as he wished that it might hap.

Thereat a terror seized my heart
  He was foredoomed: and I was wise
And wished a long life for my part
  Should we fail of our paradise

With joyous tilts and ladies' love,
  Fair things, and flower-crowned revelry:
And were we never hence to move,
  God's martyrs in the middle sea.

The Captain looked up in my face
  Amazed and blank, then slunk away
And went about from place to place
  Nor spoke to me again that day.

The next day twice he passed me by
Then turned, and said, "My words were nought:
Why do you look so bitterly
As if some evil I had wrought?

This is a calm such as might chance
In any sea that you could find."
Yet here withal he looked askance
Eastward, as though he prayed for wind.

I said, "They say that God hears prayer,
And, by the Saints I deem it true;
You asked a small thing, and a fair:
Suppose that God has given it you.

To die in war, when all is said,
You and your fellows, this you asked:
God is a great God, by my head,
And is not lightly overtasked.

Pray again, Captain, as before
And we shall see that abbey fair
Clean standing on some grassy shore;
And well I wish that I was there.

O for another draught of life
I would endure their lazy hum
And snatch some flower from their strife—
Cucullus non facit monachum."

He said no more but slouched his hat
And went, and soon I heard him sing,
And saw his flushed face, as he sat
With our fellows, carolling.

Within a while they sang no more,
For many a day we hung there still,
And want of water grieved us sore,
To eat our meat we had no will.

And now Sir Nicholas sat silent,
Although his lips were still moving,
So that men deemed a spell he meant
To call up some unholy thing.

Thus lay we till the twentieth night,
Which was with moon and clear enow,
The Fighting Man lay in our sight
Some half a furlong from our bow.

Between her masts in the moonlight
We saw a small black cloud arise;
We were as joyous at that sight
As we had found our paradise.

Straightway the Captain cried aloud,
"Man oars and sails! here cometh wind!"
But so increased on us that cloud,
His words we had no time to mind,

When no man now could see his hand,
And the green seas rolling in;
Then neither had we place to stand,
And but if one some hope could win

Straight were his troubles at an end.
In rags the sails went, weak and strong,
The masts like withy twigs did bend
And through the dark we went headlong.

At night we drove before the gale,
And fain we were, that tide, of light;
The leaden day came dull and pale
And little clearer than the night.

Four days the Rose Garland was cast
From hill to hill of inky sea,
And then the wind gave out at last
And from the west blew easily.

The Wanderers

And we, storm-tossed and battered men,
Could count our losses, who were now
But threescore rusty folk, and ten,
Who were two hundred, brave enow

Of gold and silver—What betid
That night unto the Fighting Man
From us for ever will be hid;
The dying moon with mist was wan,

Across that light we saw her men
Run hurrying to sail and oar,
We saw her sails flap downward; when
The dark came and we saw no more.

A ship sailing (small)

WE came unto another land
With gentle winds in two days more;
But all unlike the fair green strand,
This was a brown and dreadful shore.

Natheless of water were we fain
So sent some twenty fellows tall
To fetch it at whatever pain
And what flesh they might meet withal.

Of flesh indeed we had some store
So cared the less: in half a day
Back came our hunters to the shore,
Two less than they had gone away.

Water they had with them enow,
For flesh two lions dead they bore
Smitten with many a stab and blow,
And somewhere had the fight been sore

For many of our folk were torn:
  Thus said they, that the land was bad,
Never was land so foul, forlorn
  And crossed and evil, dull and sad,

Until a small vale fair and green
  Betwixt two rugged hills they found,
As fair a place as man has seen
  Where streams and wells did much abound,

Set all about with orange trees
  And heavy-hung pomegranates fair;
They shouted, setting eyes on these,
  And made haste to be quickly there.

But as they stooped by the full brook
  And drank great draughts upon their knees,
Or down from off the fair trees shook
  Pomegranates, and great oranges,

Lions set on them, two were slain
  At unawares, and many a wound
The others had, but with great pain
  They slew two, chased the rest, and bound

The slain beasts upon boughs. This tale
  Set all of us afire to go
And see this dangerous and fair vale
  And slay the beasts that plagued it so.

We chose a twenty men to stay
  And guard the ship, that now lay hid
Under a ness; then went away
  All armed; and strange things straight betid.

For as we came just at the head
  Of that rough pass that reached the place,
The foremost man stopped short and said,
  Turning on us a mazed face,

The Wanderers

"Hold! hold! for many well-armed men
Be in the valley, by God's blood!"
Softly enough we crawled on then
Unto a rock near where we stood,

Priests, bull, ladies, soldiers (big)

Behind which many a man might hide.
Then through the valley in our sight
Five hundred soldiers straight did ride,
All featly armed in armour bright,

Not loathly black men, by my head,
But white and fair as men might be;
And soon two ways they opened
And then a new thing did we see.

There in the midst of carven stone
An altar, built in ancient wise,
A white bull that did stamp and moan,
And two priests dight for sacrifice;

Behind ten damsels who were clad
More richly than the tongue can say,
Gold crowns upon their heads they had,
Gold copes their kirtles overlay.

So delicate their beauty was
With open mouths we lay and stared;
But with a frown Sir Nicholas
His trenchant shining sword half bared,

Muttering, "Some Moloch's sacrifice!"
But I thought, well with one of these
Could I make me a paradise
Among these flowers and sweet trees.

Natheless their eyes were full of woe,
And heavily they hung the head;
So that I deemed it might be so
Even as Sir Nicholas had said.

Now did the priests move presently
And slew the white bull where he stood,
And on the people standing by
Threw up in showers the dark red blood.

Then came the maidens up, and cast
White lilies on the altar stone,
Then to the other side they passed,
Towards us and there stood alone

And seemed half-fainting with some grief
But none said ought; and then there came
An armed man crowned with oaken leaf,
And underneath the bull set flame

When on the altar it was laid,
Then as the flames shot up on high
Outlandish horns and trumpets made
A strange and solemn melody.

And this being done, there came again
The priests to where the maids did stand,
And seemed in words we heard not plain
To give to them some straight command

The meaning whereof soon we knew,
For forthwith all their golden crowns
And gold copes on the ground they threw,
Then set their fair hands to their gowns,

Then on the green grass piteously
The silken garments down did rain,
The soft smocks slipped from breast and thigh
They never now should hide again.

And if for shame and sore trembling
A little while a damsel stayed
The priest cried out at that fair thing
Till mother-naked she was made.

So mid their raiment there a space
Naked they stood nor word did say,
Nor of those men asked any grace
Knowing full well the bitter play

That should be played: for thither drew
The priest and with cold sour face
Set them in order two and two
And moved them slowly from that place.

Led by the priests and minstrelsy
To a huge rock they came at last,
Over against where we did lie.
Then to each side the minstrels passed

Adown the vale, and the wind sent
This way and that their golden hair
About their bodies as they went
With fainting feet through flowers fair.

And then came forth four sturdy men
With brazen chains that foot and hand
They did upon the damsels ten;
And when so bound they all did stand

Unto the rock they made them fast.
And when we saw them side by side
Wailing and naked, then at last
Scarce in our place could we abide.

But Nicholas said: "Bide, fair fellows,
And see some further felony
Before we come to handy blows
And die like men if needs must be.

For this I think to be their case,
And with the thought is my soul sick,
That chaining them in this wild place
They leave them to be eaten quick

Of those same beasts that fell on you.
  Now if things be thus as I say,
Since they are many we are few;
  Bide here until they go away,

Which needs they must ere the beasts come—
  Small help shall we be being rash!"
Straightway we heard the burr and hum
  Of their great horns and cymbals' clash,

That drowned the poor lost maids' wailing.
  Then turned the felons hastily,
And got them gone with horns sounding
  From out the vale; yet abode we

Behind the rock, lest, to our cost
  Some one might turn upon his tracks
To seek some thing he might have lost,
  And bring the others on our backs.

But as we waited, with dull roar
  We saw steal forth a yellow beast,
And then another, then three more,
  Then many flocked toward the feast.

Judge if we griped the sword hilt then
  Or of the axe the plated haft,
Or if those few that were bowmen
  Drew to the head of the long shaft.

And out we broke with a great shout,
  And ran toward the rock with speed;
There did we ring those maids about,
  And unto our defence took heed.

And soothly there was a grim fight,
  So many were the beasts and fell
That we had liefer men of might
  Had been before us; truth to tell

Ladies chained to rock, lions coming (big)

Here was no talk of ransoming,
The fallen man to shreds was rent.
There happed full many a grievous thing,
But in the end the beasts were shent,

And all were slain; yet did they tear
Ten of our folk, so stout they fought.
Fain were they of the feast so fair
The felons for their maws had brought.

Then from the rock all tenderly
We loosed those ladies; and full oft
Deliciously our hearts beat high
At touching the round limbs so soft,

The dainty hands and naked feet.
Long was it doing, but at last
An end it had; then as was meet
We brought them all the raiment cast

Down by the altar: and all mazed
They decked themselves in these again,
And in their country tongue they praised,
Or so we deemed, our care and pain.

Then said one, "This is the Greek tongue
That erst at Micklegarth I heard
By the Greek king when I was young,
Yet lacks it something, by my beard."

Then by our fellow that knew Greek
We bade them have no fear at all,
For we their proper land would seek,
Being masters of a dromond tall.

Thereto they said, that in short space
Their country folk would thither come
To take their crushed bones from that place
And bury them with tears at home;

That overland their country lay,
  Our dromond was no skill therefore;
But prayed us with them still to stay
  And with them leave this cursed shore.

"At home ye shall be kings," they said,
  "When that they know your noble deed
And nothing, by Diana's Head,
  Shall be denied that ye may need."

Then did we ask them whence they came,
  And how they were in such a case,
And if their country was of fame,
  And if they were of Grecian race.

"Sirs, of the Ladies' Land we be,"
  They said, "and such-like are our folk
That ladies there have sovreignty
  And men be underneath the yoke.

Now of the race whereof ye speak,
  Our country was of noble fame,
Yet know we not this word of 'Greek'
  And have not even heard the name.

Needs must we say our country 'was,'
  For now are we in servage base,
Being but poor conquered folk, alas!
  Therefore are we in evil case:

For now this tribute must we pay
  Each year unto the Emperor,
Ten maids of us these beasts must slay
  In honour of his ancestor

Who was a God called Hercules:
  Yea, Sirs, and even now we fear
His wrath not lightly to appease
  When of this slaughter he shall hear."

The Wanderers

"Have no fear, fair maidens," we said,
"We do not greatly doubt his might,
And for his God, now is he dead,
And hidden up from all men's sight.

And some of us have fought in France
And some in wild Prussia have been,
And some in Spain have led the dance
And unafraid Greek fire seen.

Yea, and to some isle will we flee,
And there our bodies from him hide,
And live long lives there, if so be
That ours should prove the weaker side."

Now as we talked together thus
We heard a great horn sound afar,
With a long wail and piteous,
And blown unlike a point of war.

And then we saw where came riding
Folk all in black but armed nobly,
A sad song did their trumpets sing
And ever went they heavily.

Procession of other ladies with banner (big)

Over their heads a great banner,
Wherein was painted royally
Diana, with her snooded hair
And fair legs naked to the knee.

And in the midst a great black bier
All wrought about with cypress trees,
And ever as they drew anear
We saw that they were all ladies.

Now when they saw us, still they stood
Amazed, a while, then spurred forward,
And leaping down amid the blood
Of men and beasts upon the sward,

Caught up in arms those maidens fair
  Weeping aloud, and kissed them oft
Upon the lips and yellow hair,
  Or nestled in their bosoms soft.

Then in a while they turned to us
  And, seeing the dead men who lay
All rent and torn, and piteous,
  They said, "We thought to take away

Some little bones of poor damsels:
  Therefore at home a tomb there is
Well built mid trees and sounding wells,
  Unto your dead men we give this.

And unto you that be alive
  Will we give whatsoe'er you ask,
And evermore, Sirs, will we strive
  To be your handmaidens; no task

Shall be too much for our good will.
  Now come with us to our country
For soothly would we gaze our fill
  On such men, if no Gods ye be."

"We have some fair fellows," we said,
  "Left in our ship, these would we bring
And other matters—By God's Head
  There have we many a full fair thing

May be to you all strange and new."
  Thus said we, and went all away
Toward the ship, except a few
  Who with the ladies there did stay.

There when we met our fellows, we
  From out the ship did quickly take
What we could carry easily
  And chiefly for the ladies' sake.

The Wanderers

As for ourselves, we thought that there
Of nothing would there be a lack,
So needed nought but some poor fare
And the good armour on the back.

There did we leave the Rose Garland:
God wot if she were borne away
A fair spoil to some heathen land
Or slowly rotted where she lay!

All riding away together (big)

SO when we were all met again
The dead men on the bier we laid
And crossed the desert with much pain,
Nor were we any more afraid

Of any thing that we might meet,
Being now a goodly company
All armed, for every maiden sweet
Rode girt with sword about the thigh.

The land was desolate and rough,
And waterless till the fourth day,
Then came a green plain fair enough
Where many a head of neat did play.

For two days more we travelled on
And rich and fair the land was still.
The third at early morn we won
The top of a round-headed hill.

The ladies' town (big)

Then showed the ladies how their town
Lay in the valley, and thereby
A river toward the sea ran down,
Where many a keel we did espy.

Thence did we send a messenger, The Wanderers
One of the ladies from that place,
Off to their Queen upon the spur
To show her lightly all the case.

And as we drew anigh thereto
The folk came thronging thick and fast
Or out upon the walls they drew,
Until through the great gate we passed.

Great was the town and built nobly Inside with people riding (big)
And all with black was hung about,
Which down they tore as we went by
And hung rich golden carpets out.

Soon to a mighty hall we came, The Queen, old, by herself (small)
And there upon a throne of gold
In gold raiment, a noble dame
Ancient and grey we did behold.

Then on their knees the ladies fell,
And fain we would have done the same
And shown her reverence full well;
But down from off her throne she came

And took us by the hands and said:
"Which is your Lord, that I may give
My crown to him from off my head,
And make him king while he shall live?

And you, Sirs, ask for heaps of gold
And lands and houses; do not fear
In any thing to be too bold."
Now when this saying I did hear,

And saw our knights with wild eyes stare
Upon those maids fit to entice
A wise man into foolish ways,
I thought, here ends our Paradise.

Then spoke Sir Nicholas and said,
"O Queen, it seemeth unto me
I ask a great thing, by my head!
The body of my sweet lady."

Therewith the leader of the band
That came that day into the vale
Did he lead forward by the hand;
And she by turns both red and pale

Her head upon his shoulder leant;
And of the other maidens, some
Blushing, their dear eyes downward bent;
While from our knights there rose a hum,

And some stood all pale and upright
Looking aloof with troubled eyes—
Sirs, there can be no fairer sight
In any hall of Paradise.

Then did the Queen laugh out and say,
"O Sir, your boon seems small enow,
To ancient folk like me and grey.
Have here the crown upon your brow:

And no light thing therewith ye have
For ye shall lead us in the war
And from our foes this city save,
Many and grievous as they are."

Then answered Nicholas again,
"O Queen, ye make too much of this:
We were well paid for all our pain
With no more guerdon than a kiss.

But if of us ye please to make
Your knights and soldiers, will we then
Do noble battle for your sake;
For neither are we borel men:

From Harald Fair-Hair am I sprung
And thence from Odin in right line,
Who was a God, as skalds have sung.
Ye see this jewelled collar shine

About my armour; this to me
The King of England with his hand
Did give, upon his own galley
By Sluse hard by the Flemish Land.

And these are knights and gentlemen
Who know no fear, well skilled in war
And each a worthy match for ten
Of such folk as your foemen are.

With these men and your country-folk
Will we well guard this fair walled town
And you from this felon's yoke;
But never will I wear your crown

For of your law I know not ought,
And you are old and ripe in wit;
On many a hard thing have you thought
And have been used long time to sit,

Judging the people day by day."
"Sir," said the Queen, "so be it then,
Yet am I bondwoman alway
To you and to your noble men.

And, for your ancestor Odin
A noble temple shall he have
With a gold altar set therein
Which many a skillful man shall grave."

"Lady," he said, "by no dead man
Were we brought to the lions' jaws,
Through many waters wild and wan:
I rede you know our holy laws,

And learn to know the Trinity
The Mother of God and All Hallows;
And leave your false Gods." Silently
She stood and listened with bent brows,

While our mass-priest took up the word
And showed her much about her faith,
And many things about the Lord,
And what the holy Gospel saith.

At last she said, "Sir Holy Man
Too many things at once ye show;
I will believe all that I can:
But pray you cease for a while now.

Truly it makes the senses reel
To hear all this so suddenly—
The Gods we sought in woe and weal
Devils, or else a painted lie.

And many things must we believe,
That now for the first time we know
And from you by mere chance receive,
Or lie in endless fiery woe.

Sirs, ye are noble, and we think
Ye would not bid us trust a lie,
Or from a muddied river drink.
Your God has served you faithfully,

So in some fountain wash away,
If so ye will, our forebear's sin
Who stole the apple as ye say;
Faith an ill deed he did therein.

And that good Lord of whom ye tell,
Who all his life did nought but good,
And loved the people passing well;
And whom, upon a cross of wood,

For his reward they foully hung—
  Would God I had been there that day!
Another song ye might have sung,
  Your faith been turned another way.

Now for a while let these things be—
  And for the rest, I dare well say
That who will choose as foolishly
  As your chief, none will say him nay.

And therewithal, Sirs, will we give
  Some house and goods and needful weed
To each; that while with us ye live
  Such common things ye may not need."

Then from the presence did we go;
  And over my shoulder as we went
I looked full oft that I might know
  If my maid's eyes were on me bent.

But she held ever down her head
  Toward the ground and smiled gently,
Moving her lips as if she said
  Some little ballad inwardly.

Then to a chamber did we come
  Where, being unarmed, on us they did
Such gowns as there were none in Rome
  Ere of the Cæsars they were rid.

Then came we to another hall
  Spread for a feast, and hung around
With histories, where ladies tall
  In strife with men full many a wound

Both gave and took: and there we met
  Unarmed and gay the maidens sweet,
With gems in their white bosoms set,
  And naked arms, and gold-shod feet.

Feast (big)

Not half so sweet the west wind smells
That blows in spring through the may-bush;
Sweeter their voice than he that tells
The coming summer, or the thrush;

Or Philomela that bewails
The wrongs of many hundred years,
And fills our hearts with speechless tales,
Our ears with sweet and causeless tears.

Softly they bid us to the feast
Which was full noble, and withal
Was many a pageant and strange beast
Brought for our pleasure through the hall.

There saw we how that Theseus slew
The Beast, by help of a poor may,
To whom not long abode he true;
There saw we the Knight Perseus slay

The evil thing by the sea-side;
There was the noble story told
Of those good knights that wandered wide
With Jason for the Fleece of Gold.

Thereafter all the feast being done
We wandered in a garden green;
And I for my part went alone
With her that was my joy and Queen.

Sweet follies there we said and did,
I list not tell now, being old:
Only I know, her face half-hid
Among her rippled hair of gold,

She burst out singing suddenly
While I was telling of our quest
And of the land we thought to see
In some far ocean of the west.

SONG

O LOVE whither do you go
Spear in hand and belted so?

I go to win a crown, my love,
To put your golden hair above,
I go to fight and travail sore
That you may cling to me the more.

Two lovers in garden (big)

I will wear a crown of green
With red roses set between,
If it be not rich enow
Then sweet kisses shall you sow
In between the flowers red
All about my golden head;
I will cling so hardily
You shall never go from me.

O my Love, soon goes the day,
  O my Love, soon comes the night;
All my glory goes away,
  Comes my hour of delight.

O GOD! how sweet the kisses were
  Upon her lips and breast and brow
Amid the glory of her hair—
Ah folly, to remember now

When I am old and soon to die!
  —Sirs, to my tale. So passed away
The golden days most happily
  In many a quaint disport and play.

For there were tiltings with the spear,
  Music in gardens and in halls,
And converse with our ladies dear,
  And dancing between golden walls.

And beautiful old tales were sung
By minstrels that were well beseen
On fair long wooden stages hung
With palaces, and gardens green.

Wedding (big) and ladies being christened

And soon the maids were christened
With much pomp in the great church, then
Full richly were we fellows wed
And were the happiest of all men.

NOW amid all these pleasant days
Sir Nicholas went to and fro
Strengthening the city in all ways
Lest the Great King should come thereto.

In time indeed, for on a day
His herald to the city came
With a foul message by my fay,
Whose best word was but blood and flame:

That he would sow the place with salt,
And yoke young maidens to his plough,
And take such vengeance for their fault
That no grass any more should grow

In all the land: that those that fell
By the sharp sword should fare the best:
That when the scourge had torn them well
Fierce fire should burn up the rest.

But first a great drove would he drive
Unto his country, that his men
Might see them naked, and alive
Into the fire send them then.

That for the strangers who had come
By water, when their eyes were out,
By water would he send them home
With great stones tied their necks about.

Now we, when this thief we had heard,
Went nigh to slay him evilly;
But at the last his hair and beard
We shaved, and ugly devils three

Upon his tabard did we paint,
And sent him back, and by my head
Then was no time for us to faint,
For then were we as good as dead.

Now was it but a word and blow;
For the third day we saw the smoke
Of the burnt homesteads upward go
All round the City; and poor folk

Came hurrying in through all the gates,
Men, ancient folk, and maids weeping;
Then did we arm us with our mates,
And go to look upon the King.

Soon met we certain of his folk
Burning a village, and at first
We slew some hundred in the smoke,
And afterwards put to the worst

Another band more orderly;
And as they came on thicker then
We gat us back to the city,
Leaving but two of all our men.

And at our heels a rabble came,
At whom so well the archers shot
They scattered with no little shame,
And with our walls they meddled not:

Whom straight, as afterwards we learned,
The Great King met as fast they fled,
And caused some of them to be burned,
Some to be scourged till they were dead.

Then soon with much folk, and great show,
And cymbals and great horns sounding,
There came one whom the maids did know
By his apparel for the King.

Who having sacrificed a bull
To some dead dog, gave straightly word
That they should take that city, full
Of living souls, and to the sword

Put all the men, and old women;
But take the younger ones alive,
And shut them, fettered, in a pen.
A fierce assault they then did give,

But nothing won but loss and harm.
So past the next day, and the next,
Nor any day without alarm.
And all day long their camp we vext

With arrows, quarrels, and big stones.
And oft they shot wild-fire forth
That burned the marrow and bones.
At last Sir Nicholas grew wrath

And swore to end the thing or die,
So the tenth night from a small gate
We issued out, we fellows only,
When moonless was the night and late.

Then to the King's tent did we go
And found him drunk amid his men
Who lay about him drunk also;
Then took we him with eight or ten

Of his chief lords and came away.
  Great joy there was in the city
Thereof, as soon as it was day;
  But from the camp arose a cry,

And straight they trussed them to be gone;
  Then did we open the gates wide
And set on them with sword and stone,
  Arrow and spear, on every side.

Nor made they any great defence,
  But ever, running here and there
Half armed, but hasted to get thence—
  Fair grew the field flowers that year

Over the bones of those that came
  To ravish, torture, and to slay,
To set the city on a flame
  And lead the fairest maids away.

Now when from very weariness
  The slaughter ceased, with bells ringing
Back went we, whom all folk did bless,
  And out of hold we took the King

Who when he saw his end was near
  His helpless God he loud did curse,
And grovelling his beard did tear,
  And ever grew from bad to worse;

Yea, scarce a man he seemed to be
  When to the market-cross he came,
And trailing hung back heavily,
  And let us drag him without shame.

There was his vile head smitten off;
  And yet, because he was a king,
We slew him without any scoff,
  Nor paid him back with torturing

The Wanderers

A triumph (big)

For his vile words; and his body
Under the earth with little show
We laid, but without villainy;
Being wishful to forget all now.

For no more evil could he do,
And he was come of noble kin
Who dwelt in Greece a while ago
And were great Lords and Knights therein.

Now he being dead, there came to us
Three ancient men to pray us peace,
And that for ransom plenteous
Their folk taken we would release.

And we thereto being nothing loth,
Took of them money and much good,
And caused them swear a solemn oath,
And swore ourselves upon the Rood.

So now that ended was this strife
Like Lords and Kings we dwelt at home
And long time lived a quiet life
Nor yet had any will to roam.

River of sand lions with wings fiery well, ox over hell mouth (small)

But of the marvels of the land
The Ladies showed us many things;
As of the river of fine sand,
The lions that had eagles' wings.

The Land of Darkness too they showed,
The bottomless and fiery well;
The great brass ox that ever lowed
Over the going down to Hell.

Two pictures (big) one in hall one in garden of joyances

The time is short to tell of these,
And of the tiltings that we had,
The feasts and other joyances
Wherewith the Ladies made us glad.

IF here my tale could have an end,
O my masters, I might say now
Although our lives we well might mend
Yet were we happy men enow.

The Wanderers

Further afield my story goes
And drags us through most evil ways,
And woes past all our other woes;
Unbearable and heavy days.

For there we all lived happily
Until our youth was wholly gone
And wives and friends began to die:
Then on a day I walked alone,

And as I walked, there all about
The merry children at their play
Ran by, with many a joyous shout;
And there went singing many a may.

Thereby a house was built richly
Behind a garden walled with stone,
Therein upon the grass did lie
A fair maid singing all alone.

SONG

SHE

IN the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
Sweet, be merry for my sake;
Twine the flowers in my hair,
Kiss me where I am most fair,
Ah! kiss me, love, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

Two lovers with music (big)

HE

Love, hold back the golden hair,
That hides you where you are most fair,
Let me kiss the rose-tinged snow.
Ah! the time goes, fast or slow—
Kiss me, my sweet! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

SHE

Shall we weep for a dead day
Or set sorrow in our way?
Will you weep that the days wear,
Hidden in my golden hair?
Kiss me, my love, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

HE

O Love, weep that the days flit
As on my neck I feel your breath
That I may then remember it
When I am old and near my death.
O kiss me, love, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

WHETHER with music, or the pain
Of moody thought touched to the quick,
I know not, but like summer rain
My tears upon the dust fell thick.

And far away my thoughts were brought
When I was but a boy at play,
Nor yet of life or death had thought,
But only on the coming day,

The Wanderers

The great hall where the people ate,
The church half-hidden by the hill,
The pier, where in the evening late
The covered ship lay grim and still,

The gold-coped singers in the quire,
My mother's hand upon my head,
The stories round the big yule-fire,
The snow upon the tower-lead,

The rough old vassals, cap in hand
Unto the Master of the House,
The steward with his silver wand,
The squires slim and amorous—

All rose before my swimming eyes
And still that maid sang loud and clear,
Like some lark in her extasies,
That half pierced to my muffled ear.

Young lady singing
Crone and Rafe (small)

But from the house came suddenly
An old crone propped with crutches tied
With many a bandage; that with high
And shrill voice did the damsel chide.

Till she arose and entered in:
She and her singing gone away,
My dreams fled as a saint flees sin,
And all the sunlight left the day.

Then on I went distraught, moody,
Doubtful, unhappy in my heart;
Counting the few years left to me
The fair things death would from me part.

In this mood came I to the quay,
Where lay the ships both great and small,
Some just at point to go away,
Some just letting the anchor fall.

There did I find Sir Nicholas
Whose wife was dead now for this year;
Moody of countenance he was,
He saw me not as I drew near.

For at a ship he was gazing,
Whose folk were loosening her prow
From the great cable of the ring
That bound her to the shore: but now

Round at my touch he turned to me,
And for awhile along the quay
We walked together silently
Till I found heart at last to say:

"Do you remember the ill dream
You told me in the Rose Garland,
When evil did our voyage seem;
And that you wished a Christian land?

Behold your wish has come to pass
For all this we have christened,
And for our quest, Sir Nicholas,
With right few words it had an end.

Yea on their banners now they bear
The Holy Mother of God's Son
Rayed round with gold, instead of her
That loved of old Endymion."

He said, "Our souls may now be safe
Where all folk worship the high God:
Yet sometimes do I wish, O Rafe,
That I were underneath the sod,

Thinking of her that had a part
In days that now are overpast—
Ah fool! ever to set my heart
On one who needs must die at last!

Yea, I remember that ill dream
  And I remember too the first:
Now do all past days good days seem
  When we are getting to the worst."

I said, "Like you do I regret
  Overpast time; yet still I think
We might be happy even yet—
  Yea, if we were upon the brink

Of death itself: for were we mad
  When we left friends, goods and country
One day—such strong belief we had
  In that fair place beyond the Sea.

Here is our life of little worth,
  These few last years will soon be past;
And I am weary of the earth
  With death for our reward at last.

Behold these ships all-boun for sea—
  And what shall hinder us to go?
For here we have all sovreignty,
  In nothing folk can say us no."

Then said he, "Rafe, I thought on this
  A while ago, in very deed,
When ended was my earthly bliss,
  And death seemed coming for our meed.

And even now, I sought this place
  That I might think upon the sea,
And of the days when in short space
  We thought in Paradise to be.

And now the time is short, I fear,
  When we are gotten old and grey,
And this quest might take many a year,
  And we may die off any day.

Yet at all hazards will I go;
Therefore I pray thee our men find
And whether folk say yea or no,
If there be ten men of our mind,

Will we spend our last years in this."
Then merry grew my heart again,
For either should we come to bliss
Or at the worst have no more pain

Than death at last. I left him there
And with much trouble and fair words
Prevailed on twenty of our men
Who in that place were mighty lords,

Turn simple mariners again.
Then did we buy a ship with gold
And left that place with little pain;
For some were dead, and all were old

Of our first loves; their blood was chill
And little moaning did they make,
Though certainly none wished us ill
And we were sorry for their sake.

Ships going people of shore (big)

Though at our parting some did weep,
Remembering the green valley,
And how their bodies we did keep
Safe that day from the enemy,

By no constraint or bitter prayer
They held us: as we left the shore
We saw the folk pass here and there,
And all things went on as before.

WHEN first we left the river-mouth
Being wishful to get out to sea
We turned our vessel to the South
Although the wind was easterly.

But when we lost the land at last
We steered again toward the West,
As in the merry days now past
When ever we did hope the best.

Scarcely now had we hope or fear,
Although the savour of the sea
Pricked thoughts now dead for many a year.
But to fulfil our destiny

Was all our thought: yet none the less
Though we were old yet brisk we were,
And felt no pain or weariness,
As we slid through the water clear.

Now did we run before the wind
For many a day and still no land
Or good or evil could we find,
Or signs of it on any hand,

As short-winged birds or floating rack.
So when it reached the fortieth day,
Of food and drink we feared a lack
Though through the sea we made great way.

Therefore we ate right sparingly
And drank still less; yet passed withal
The tenth day, no land could we see
And sore famine on us did fall.

The next day, just at sunrising,
The watchman cried, "Land cometh now!"
Glad were we when a small white thing
We saw upon the weather bow.

Thither we steered, and at noontide
Began to draw anigh thereto,
And saw a city fair and wide
And looked to hear of something new.

The white walls stood in the green sea,
The white foam fringed them all around;
By them the wind went noisily,
Nor heard we any other sound,

As hale and how of mariners
Or cries of men, or bells ringing
Or music when some great Lord stirs,
Or any such-like wonted thing.

And though the harbour was nigh full
Of fair new ships, yet alongside
The harbour-tower a rusty hull
Lay swinging in the rising tide.

The harbour-mouth was full narrow,
So as smooth water we did win
We well nigh brushed against the bow
Of this old ship that stood therein.

Now as we passed it, was I ware
Of Nicholas, who with face all wan
Cried out aloud, "O, Sirs, look there!
The image of the Fighting Man."

There on the prow the image stood,
Battered and ruined of its gold,
Yea, and beside, the carven rood
We knew there in the days of old.

And round about the gunwale ran
The lions of Sir Nicholas;
And underneath the Fighting Man
In copper letters beaten was,

"O Jesu Mercy." Now when we
By all these tokens knew her well,
What bitter stings of memory
Beset us, it were hard to tell.

What! were these thirty years a dream,
And we young still? I looked and there
My fellows stood, with many a seam
Upon their faces, and white hair

Was trickling down from every hood.
Take this for answer: we must die
Or win all, by the Holy Rood—
We must win all, and presently,

Or else before us death would go
And meet us at the Happy Place;
Yea, in the golden gate thereto,
We should but see his fearful face.

Where were our fellows, that we saw
The last time, ere the storm came on,
Just smitten by the gusty flaw?
Like us some shelter they had won

Doubtless, but had they left their quest
Like us, and in some pleasant isle
Forgotten death, and made the best
Of common life a little while?

Or were they slain as they sought life,
Or had they, by some happy fate,
Passed through turmoil and deadly strife
And reached at last the golden gate?

Then such ill thoughts went through my brain,
I cannot bring my tongue or lip
To tell you what they were again:
Pass it—Now no man touched the ship,

Until, as we went slowly past
I caught a grapnel up and ran
And threw it, thinking to hold fast
The bulwark of the Fighting Man;

But when upon the rope I leant
The grapnel came home to my hand,
And into dust the bulwark went
As though it had been built of sand.

Then one man with a boarding-spear
Thrust at the ship's side, and straightway
Through the great hole did we see clear
That there our old companions lay.

Asleep they seemed but all ruddy
And neither dead nor gotten old;
But young men fresh and all lusty,
As when we last did them behold.

Then none of us did any more
But let our ship go drifting by
Until we struck against the shore;
Then did we land, but fearfully,

And looking round about like men
Woke up in some unknown wild place
After a battle; and with wan
And timorous looks we prayed God grace,

Then with drawn swords moved down the quay.
Folk saw us who stood ever still
Nor turned their heads, nor word said they
Or noticed us for good or ill.

And this we thought a marvellous thing,
That being fresh landed from the sea
No man said ought of marketing,
Or asked us what the news might be.

And in the ships in like manner
The folk moved neither more nor less;
There stood the master-mariner
Beside the helm all motionless.

There stood the sailor with one hand
Upon the rope, or on the shroud
One foot. And in that quiet land
Our footfalls seemed to groan aloud.

Then such a fear did seize on me
I never think to feel again
In whatsoever case I be:
Yet went we on, driven by pain

Of famine and by great wonder,
For soon we saw these men were dead
But uncorrupted: oft would stir
Their raiment, and their hair drifted

This way and that way in the wind,
That mocked their sleep so noisily.
Then did it come into my mind
That this the place had used to be

We were in search of: our fellows
Had found it happily; and then
God had o'erwhelmed it with His blows
That kill without destroying men.

Along the quays to the big gate
Which was most stately, then we came
Into a city rich and great,
Where still all folk did seem the same.

The riches of this dead city,
And the dead folk that were therein,
Were hard to tell; for verily
If one Byzantium should win,

A country village would he have
By this; but now a piece of bread
We lacked, our very lives to save,
Or else right soon we were but dead.

On all the shops and stalls there lay
Both bread and meat, and other things,
Whereto in spite of fear, straightway
We ran to deaden our cravings.

But though these things looked fresh and fair
As those that stood and could not stir,
Yet when within our hands they were,
They went away to mere powder.

Then did we see no other rede
But in our ship to get away,
And for some help in this sore need
To God and all the Saints to pray.

And yet because the sea was wide,
And no good land we might come to,
There on the land we would abide
Till all the city was gone through.

So through the long streets on we went,
And man, and maid, and child we met
Like painted images of Ghent,
Within some fair cathedral set.

Now to a square we came at last
Midmost of which a conduit fair
Four streams of water outward cast
That ran four ways throughout the square.

Thereto I and my fellows ran,
For fain we were to quench our drouth;
But when unto the water wan
I stooped and thought to set my mouth,

Nought met my mouth but common air:
Then wearily we turned us round,
And spying a great palace there
We entered it, and heard no sound

The Wanderers

But of the wind that ever went
Through open doors, and fires vast
That through the chimnies upward sent
Great roaring; so straightway we passed

Men going into palace (small)

Through many a chamber and rich hall,
Where the worst hangings that we saw
Were wrought of gold and royal pall
Or samite without any flaw.

There did we pass through the guard-room,
There saw we dames half-hid with veils,
And ladies working at the loom,
And ladies holding books of tales.

Then came we to a door close-shut,
Where stood a soldier with a spear,
As if on guard he had been put;
We passed him by with little fear

And found a court of marble white,
Set round with pots of orange-trees,
And midmost, open to the light,
A clear green pool, where three ladies

Naked, but covered to the knee
By the thin water, stood bathing;
While on the brink lay daintily
Their clothes with many a chain and ring.

Ladies bathing (small)
The Knights don't come in any of these three last pictures

Well nigh we wept thereat, although
We were in evil case, and old;
Yet went, and to a chamber low
We came where was a bed of gold

Where sat, half-dressed, a maiden sweet,
While by her, on the floor there lay
A goodly man who kissed her feet—
She had been smiling on that day.

Lovers (small)

We sighed again, when we saw these,
And their sweet love, so quickly done;
But passed them to a close of trees,
Where birds sat glittering in the sun.

There, on one side, we saw a hall,
Whereof the door was opened wide;
Of deep green jasper was the wall
With images on every side,

In which, thereto being quickly led
By evil fate and destiny,
We found a royal table spread
And thereat a great company

Of knights and ladies sitting round,
A set smile upon every face;
Their gold gowns trailing on the ground,
The light of gold through all the place.

Minstrels were in the gallery,
With silent open mouths, and hands
That moved not on the psaltery
And citern; and with ivory wands

The marshalls stood about the hall.
And there were carpets of great cost,
And histories upon the wall
Of kings, whose very names were lost.

A wretched crew we seemed surely
Amongst such fresh things as were there,
As we moved forward fearfully
With eyes upon the table fair:

For there we saw both flesh and fowl
And fish, and many a sugared cate,
And wine in many a jewelled bowl,
And longed therefore, being moved by fate.

Then shuddering our hands we set
Unto that food: then were we glad
Past words to find it all fresh yet
And that some real man's food we had. The Wanderers

Then ate we of it greedily
Standing beside those stony folk;
Such bread as never man did buy
In any market there we broke.

And at the last, which was the worst,
Grown bold, we dared to take our seat
By those dead folk, and slake our thirst
From out their cups; yea and did eat

From dead hands many a strange morsel:
Thereof we grew right mad at last
And drunk with very wine of Hell.
And as we laughed and chattered fast

Things worthy weeping, suddenly
All things grew dim, and deadly sleep
And heavy dreams came over me
While watch the stony folk did keep The Feast (big)

With glittering eyes, and that set smile
More sad to see than bitter tears;
And the great fire burned all the while
As it had done these many years.

NOW how long in this sleep we lay,
My masters, cannot now be told;
Taking no heed of night or day,
Summer or winter, heat or cold.

Only I know, with many a dream
My sleep was filled; whereof this one
Will serve to tell of: it did seem
On a ship's deck I sat alone

Taking no care of helm or sail
Or sea; but in an ancient book
For some forgotten ancient tale
With straining eyes did ever look:

At last I found it, and it told
About a knight of Germany,
Who, when he was already old,
By water-thieves upon the sea

Was taken, and being made their slave,
Saw lands he never knew before,
Until he chanced himself to save
From out their hands, on a wild shore.

Whereon—but here the page was torn,
And as in dreams it oft will go,
I seemed to be that knight, forlorn,
Wretched and rent from top to toe.

Upon my legs fetters I saw,
Rusty and old, and felt my back
With stripes of whips was yet half raw,
And victuals I did wholly lack.

I drifted in this evil plight
For many a league, it seemed to me,
Until at last I came in sight
Of a good ship upon the sea.

And when her folk did see me there
They sent a shallop thence with speed,
And brought me to a dromond fair;
And of her crew I took good heed.

They were an aged company
And yet were richly dressed withal;
Now knew I all their history,
Though no man spoke to me at all,

As oft in dreams it happeneth;
Namely that these same ancient folk
Were sailing to escape from death,
And had good hope to break his yoke

By bathing in a certain stream
That from a mountain cometh out
In some far land; now did I dream
That when I turned me round about,

My ship was sunk down in the sea,
And straightly was I dressed in gold,
The king of all that company,
But white-bearded and very old.

Then did the dromond outward go,
While we, like men remembering tales,
Went ever walking to and fro
And took no heed of masts or sails.

At last we saw a mountain rise
Before us, green a little way
Then brown, then white against the skies,
And straight the dromond turned that way

And ran upon a sandy beach,
And we with all the speed we might,
Leapt out, the happy stream to reach,
Whereof right soon we came in sight.

But when we came unto the bank,
And saw how terrible it was,
Then all our hearts within us sank,
For clearer was it than fine glass,

No wind was there or any weed
And black it was, although the sky
Over our heads was blue indeed
As is the sky of Italy.

And also on the other side
There lay a black and tangled wood
Wherefrom a noise, as if folk cried
In anguish, froze our very blood.

There stood we shivering on the brink,
Old men and women in long line,
Doubtful if this cup they would drink
Would be of endless bliss or pine.

But as we waited, doubting thus
And precious time of eld was lost,
One falling, with a piteous
And frightful face, gave up the ghost.

And one man cried, "My head, my head!"
And staggering fell in the stream
And sank; then did we count us dead
And hard I strove to break the dream.

But goaded by some sudden sting
Into that place we rushed at last
With screams wherewith the hills did ring,
That this our death might soon be past.

And now behold a fresh marvel;
This water that we dreaded so
We deemed it but the mouth of Hell,
Waist-deep through it we did but go,

And when unto the bank we came
Our clothes fell from us; then were we
Naked like Adam without shame
And fair and young as folk might be.

And in a sweet green mead we were
With flowers all about growing
And flowers set upon our hair,
And no desire for anything.

And clean forgotten was the life
We led before, and all our friends,
And all our foes, and all the strife
For many unaccomplished ends:

Yea for one minute I felt this,
But quickly was I snatched away,
My dream changed from that place of bliss,
And by a city gate I lay,

Just waked from sleep, and folk went by,
Nor spoke to me good words or bad,
Though in strange guise I there did lie,
For in my armour I was clad,

And they were all in ancient weed.
Then I arose upon my feet,
And seeing they took no further heed,
I straightway entered the long street:

There did much folk go to and fro,
And all in ancient raiment clad;
And young they were, and yet did go
Full heavily, and seemed not glad.

So soon I stopped a man who went
Wrapped with his cloak in a strange way,
His head down toward the pavement bent,
And said I had a thing to say.

"Say on," said he, nor raised his head.
"Fain would I know if folk die here,
For all of you are young," I said,
"And if of death ye have no fear,

How may I come in such-like case?"
He said, "Would God that we could die!
O man, get quickly from this place
Even if you fall dead presently—

If we could die—if we could die!
And get at last a little rest,
Twixt misery and misery!"
Therewith his hand from out his breast

He drew, and shewed a mark thereon
In fashion of an ancient seal:
"This is the Heaven we have won,
This is the guerdon of our zeal."

Therewith he filled the air with screams,
And quick I turned to get away
Half dead with fear; but as in dreams
The manner is, there must I stay.

While those folk, sealed hands raised on high,
Came flocking round me crying out,
"God, let us die! God, let us die!"
At last I sprung forth with a shout

But straight fell flatlings on my face,
And, as I struggled to arise,
Woke suddenly, in that same place
Watched by the sleepless stony eyes.

THERE burned the fire as before,
There sat unchanged the sweet ladies,
Unchangeable now any more
Until the drying of the seas.

And she beside me had risen up
To take her jewelled sandal off,
Meanwhile her lover held his cup
Out towards her with a smiling scoff.

Toward me her face was turned away
Blushing with long forgotten shame,
Across my face her long sleeve lay,
As slowly to myself I came.

Shuddering I swept it from my face
Then turning saw my fellows there,
Arising and in such-like case
As I myself; long was our hair,

And fallen away to very dust
Was all our raiment; we were clad
In armour eaten up with rust,
Whereof some store with us we had.

Together there we gathered us
And stood and knew not what to say.
—Masters, this had been piteous
To those who saw us on the day

When first we manned the Rose Garland,
Or on that merry day when we
First saw far off the low green land
And hoped to live, and happily.

At last Sir Nicholas said, "Fellows,
If ye have dreamed as I have done,
And seen what things in sleep God shows,
Your lust to live on earth is gone.

And yet I pray God of His grace,
Seeing how feeble we are grown,
To give us strength to leave this place,
And not at last to die alone,

But else on land with husbandmen
Or mariners upon the sea;
Come Sirs, or else we perish here,
And find our way back to the quay.

As for myself, I hunger not
And if ye are the same herein,
Perchance God has not yet forgot
His ancient kindness, though we sin."

Now some of us, when we heard this,
Remembering days of hope and fear,
Rest and turmoil, sorrow and bliss,
Were fain to weep, old as we were.

Natheless we moved down towards the shore
Hoping for nought but quiet death,
Nor did we look back any more
On those fair creatures that lacked breath.

Then through those courts we went again
And found the doors still open wide:
Still brushed the golden counterpane
Against that lady's naked side;

Still stood the bathing dames, spotless
In the green water, on the brink
Still lay the shoes their feet did press,
Fairer than any man could think.

And still as through the streets we went
We saw the people as before
Standing like images of Ghent,
Until we came unto the shore.

There swung our good ship in the swell
Among the others, but her sail,
We left new, strong, and sheeted well,
Was gone—none left to tell the tale.

Now all of us did kneel on knee
And for the souls of those dead men
We prayed to God full heartily,
And boarded our old vessel then

Ship rowed out (small)

And loosed the hawsers and set out
Bending but weakly to the oar,
And with no cheery and glad shout
As we had done so oft before.

The Fighting Man just as of old
We saw still swinging in the tide,
And 'twixt her timbers did behold
Our fellows laid asleep inside.

So there we left the Fighting Man,
And as we turned round toward the West
And up the white-topped seas we ran,
Almost we thought their lot the best.

Now when we were got out to sea
We laboured little at the oar,
Taking but care her head should be
Turned westward, as in days of yore.

Thus did we drift till the third day,
And then we came unto an isle,
And spying there a sandy bay
Had heart to rest a little while.

And when we landed there, we found
The place was well-watered and fair,
And sea-birds' eggs did much abound,
And ripe sweet fruit was plenty there.

We victualled the good ship with these,
Being fain to let the sea-birds go
Though tame they sat upon the trees,
For neither had we shaft nor bow.

The Wanderers

Then we took ship and put to sea,
And in such case for fifteen days
We were, as any folk might be
Who go upon the watery ways.

But then the moon being high and bright,
A rosy light we did espy
About an hour before midnight,
Far off to leeward in the sky.

And when straightway we made for it
Brighter it grew as we drew near,
But clouds across it oft would flit,
At day-break did it disappear.

By night we saw it clear again,
But redder, as a fire shows
From far, that sometimes seems to wane,
And sometimes waxing brighter grows

But this grew great, as we did sail
On towards it, till the night grew day
Therewith, and the full moon grew pale
And yet the fire was far away.

And now, since in us fear was dead,
We sailed thereto, and saw a sight
That was full dreadful, by my head,
A mighty city all alight,

But certes with no earthly flame:
No houses fell, no smoke arose,
No weeping people from it came;
About it were no shouting foes.

The burning city (big)

Upright and whole the houses stood,
There stood the pinnacles, blood-red;
Marble and stone, and brick and wood
Were bathed in fire that nothing fed.

For all the folk were gone away
Or else consumed: that God's mercy
Might light upon them did we pray—
Yea wheresoever they might be.

Then did we turn our dromond's head
And rowed West, with what strength we might,
And for three days the sky was red
With shining of that dreadful light

Both night and day: for three days more
At dark the pink cloud did we see,
Above the ever-burning shore;
Then all was grey, as it should be.

And now, Sirs, thin our story grows,
And soon unto an end we come;
Yea, a good end of all our woes
One way or other in your home.

For on the twentieth day from that
On which we left the burning town,
As idle on the deck I sat,
An hour before the sun went down,

Sir Nicholas, who at the bow
Was standing, called aloud and said:
"Ho Sirs! a new thing cometh now—
A town or white cliffs right ahead."

Then one to the mast-head did go
To whom a town it seemed to be,
Therefore we busied us to row,
And, pulling all night mightily,

At morning twilight came anear
Unto this place whate'er it was,
And anchored in the water clear.
Then to me came Sir Nicholas,

And, stammering with eagerness,
Said, "O Rafe, once I dreamed a dream,
That day upon the Northern ness,
So long ago, it now does seem

Like an old story: oft ere this
With hope that all these things might be
And we thereby should come to bliss
Have I been mocked; therefore are we

Now weak and near our death for eld:
But now, even in the gathering light,
The place that dreaming I beheld
Do I see clear with waking sight,

So may God help me, every turn
Of the white houses and the walls;
Look! Look! for now the East doth burn
With dawn, and yellow glimmer falls

On that dear place, on that sweet place,
Where we shall live for evermore.
Kneel quickly, Rafe, and pray for grace
That we may live to reach the shore."

But ere the deck did touch my knees
We heard the sound of men that sung
Born seaward from some revelries,
And through our ears and hearts it rung.

DRINK about, for night doth go,
By daylight grey hairs will show;
Now from silver lamps doth fall
Golden light on gilded wall;
Seize this hour while you may;
Let it pass—there cometh day
When all things will turn to grey.

A picture (small)

Let me think about my love
Softer than pink-footed dove;
Nobly-born, and meek, and wise
As the guard of Paradise.
She would be a King's despair
From her golden-gleaming hair
To her silver feet so fair.

Who shall pray to Proserpine
For her? Juno, for her line?
Pallas, for that she is wise
As the guard of Paradise?
Venus, she that maketh fair,
For her golden-gleaming hair?
Or Diana, the full fleet,
For her sweet and silver feet?
Ah! these even, should they care
For us that die, must once despair;
Therefore are they made most fair.

Ah! yes, she shall lie alone
Underneath a carven stone.
Then be merry while ye may
For to each shall come a day
When no pleasure shall be bought,
When no friend can guess our thought,
When all that has been, shall be nought.

NOW, when I looked at Nicholas
To see what he might think of this,
Upon the deck he sunken was
And now surely had come to bliss.

For with the singing of that song
His heart was broken, and he lay
Dead, nigh the place he sought so long:
Nor had the flush yet gone away

Wherewith his aged face was lit
While he was telling me he knew
The place, and what belonged to it,
And that his wretched dream was true.

And now, Sirs, what more can I say?
To shore we rowed, the people thronged
About us, for it now was day,
Asking to whom the ship belonged.

And when we heard them speak these words
In the Greek tongue, that well we knew,
We prayed to see their King or Lords,
And straight they brought us unto you.

Picture of City (big)

And on the way to this great Hall,
The things our captain dreamed, we saw,
As many a garden girt with wall
And the green temple without flaw.

And through the door the images
Just showed, of Venus soft and sweet,
And tall Diana with white knees
Beneath her gown, and sandalled feet.

And now, Sirs, have ye heard our tale
And by what wild hope we were led,
And why we long ago set sail;
And everything has now been said—

But this: ye are of wealth and might
And we are few and aged folk;
Yet, Sirs, take heed, for by this light!
We will not die without a stroke;

But if ye choose to give us life,
  Then what we may do, that we will,
Though we are men of war and strife,
  And in few crafts have gotten skill.

But tales of many lands we know,
  And if some poor bread these be worth,
Gladly these pastimes would we show
  As long as we may live on earth.

Sirs, pray you let us die in peace;
  And so may God your country save,
And of your goods give great increase,
  And every thing that you would have.

THE PEOPLE OF THE SHORE

ALAS! my masters, by my head
  Your hope was but a rotten reed.
What! and are not our fathers dead
  Who battled once against the Mede

Yet overlived it? Coming here,
  Through many and many a woe they passed,
Oft were their hearts fulfilled of fear,
  Yet found they rest and ease at last

Here in this land; great deeds they did
  As many an ancient story saith;
Yet these also the earth has hid,
  No man among them but found death.

The Wanderers

No doubt the Gods have sent you then
To a fair land and plenteous;
Of all the gifts they give to men
Not one have they withheld from us.

No doubt our gardens might entice
The very Gods themselves to leave
The happy woods of Paradise,
Nor once again thereafter grieve.

Their fields bright with unchanging May,
Pressed by the feet of Goddesses,
Are scarce more fair than are today
Our meadows set about with trees.

Pageant of peace (big)

Here fields of corn and pleasant hills
Dotted with orchards shall ye see,
And sweet streams turning many mills,
And of all fruits right great plenty.

By our fair-painted palaces
The green white-flowered rivers pass;
About our coasts the summer seas
Run bubbling up the slopes of grass.

Oxen and sheep and horses go
About the merry water-meads,
Where herons, and long cranes thereto,
Lie hidden in the whispering reeds.

Pretty ladies filling up picture (small)

Among all these the maidens play;
The fair white Goddess of the sea
Is little fairer made than they
In all her members certainly.

Like you, Sirs, am I chilled with eld,
  Yet still I look on them with joy,
As Priam's Lords erewhile beheld
  Fair Helen on the walls of Troy.

The Wanderers

Thereto our men are strong and brave
  And hale and seldom wanting wit,
Many a good archer we have,
  A little mark who well can hit,

And cunning folk to make for us
  The images of Gods and men,
And painted walls right beauteous,
  And men to make us music, when

Artists (small)

Our hearts are full, and men to write
  The stories of the past again,
And grave philosophers in white,
  Leeches to heal us of our pain.

Thus under gentle laws we live
  Well guarded, and in rest and peace,
And ever more and more we thrive,
  And ever do our goods increase.

Poet, sage, doctor (small)

All things the Gods give to our hands,
  Wisdom and strength, skill, great beauty,
A land that is the crown of lands—
  Yet, therewithal, at last to die.

Astrea (small)

O masters, here as everywhere,
  All things begin, grow old, decay;
That groweth ugly that was fair,
  The storm blots out the summer day.

The merry shepherd's lazy song
Breaks off before the lion's roar;
The bathing girls, white-limbed and long,
Half-dead with fear splash toward the shore

At rumour of the deadly shark;
Over the corn, ripe and yellow
The hobby stoops upon the lark,
The kestrel eyes the shrew below.

The green snake in the apple-tree
Sits watching, as the shadows pass,
The feet of some Eurydice
Half-hidden by caressing grass.

The hoar frosts cut the flowers down,
The cold north wind dries up the blood;
The glassy streams grow dull and brown,
Tormented by the winter flood.

And friends fall off and pleasures cease
As grey hairs grow upon the head,
And weariness doth so increase
We have the heart to wish us dead—

Masters, your hope that this could be,
To live for ever anywhere
Has brought sad longings strange to me,
Sad thoughts, my heart can hardly bear.

And sad words from my lips have gone
Unmeet for ancient folk to say;
Pray you forget them, ye have won
Life sweet and peaceful from today.

The Gods have sent you here to us—
The land you sought for, did you know,
A fair land and a plenteous:
Henceforth ye shall not reap nor sow,

Nor spin nor weave, nor labour aught,
But ever all things shall ye have
That can by any man be sought;
And may the Gods your dear lives save

Many a year yet; and as priests
Of some revered God shall ye be,
And sit with us at all our feasts,
And houses have in our city

With most fair gardens. Ye shall tell
What lore ye have of your country,
And other things ye know as well;
And how lands great are grown to be

Our fathers knew not, when they fled
Before the face of the Great King:
And what lands are become as dead
That in their time were flourishing.

Yea, and fair Sirs, we fain would know
Who is your God of whom ye speak;
And of the Romans shall ye show,
And ye shall tell us of the Greek

Who reigns at Byzant, as ye say;
And what of Sparta is become
And Athens, and the lands that lay
In ancient days about our home.

The Wanderers

And then in answer will we tell
Of countries that ye never knew,
Of towns, that having long stood well,
The Gods in anger overthrew;

Of kings, who in their tyranny
Were mighty once, but fell at last;
Of merchants rich as men could be,
And yet one day their wealth was past.

The voyage for the Golden Fleece,
The Doom of King Acrisius
And how the Gods gave Psyche peace—
These stories shall ye hear from us;

And many another, that shall make
Your life seem but a story too,
So that no more your hearts shall ache
With thought of all ye might not do.

Ye shall be shown how vain it is
To strive against the Gods and Fate,
And that no man may look for bliss
Without an ending soon or late.

But what is in our hands to give
That shall ye have: and now again
We pray the Gods, long may ye live,
And fall asleep with little pain.

Old chaps telling tales (big) no women

Now, Sirs, go rest you from the sea,
And soon a great feast will we hold,
Whereat some pleasant history
Such as ye wot of, shall be told.

THE STORY OF ARISTOMENES

ARGUMENT

THIS STORY TELLS OF THE LIFE OF ARISTOMENES THE MESSENIAN; AND HOW HE STROVE TO THE UTMOST OF HIS POWER TO MAKE HIS PEOPLE AND NATION FREE, AND, FAILING HEREIN, NEVERTHELESS WON A GREAT NAME THEN AND FOR EVER AFTERWARDS

HOW THEY CAME TO LACONIA

NIGH twenty years had the Messenian folk
Striven to free them from the Spartan yoke,
And fought in godlike wise, yet all in vain;
For as bright days amid the year's sure wane
At end of autumn had their victories been,
And 'twixt the bay boughs had their wise ones seen
The shadow of the end a-drawing nigh:
After each battle won must they ask why
Their fields grew narrower: helpful man on man
Failed from their triumph: ably plotted plan,
Great hearted strenuous stroke, mere winds and waves
Made nought before their foemen; their own graves
Their own swords dug; in their most glorious fields
The foes, once beaten, hung their fallen shields;
For ever in this woefullest of wars
Against them in their courses fought the stars.

So is Messenia now a Spartan farm;
Scarce are their men indeed grudged lying warm
In winter, or the shade in summer days,
Or corn or wine, so that their hands may raise
Fat crops to block the Spartan market-place;
Their women surely may grow fair of face
And delicate of limb that they may be
Well praised by men fresh come from over sea

When in the Spartan feast they pour the wine;
Their craftsmen still may fashion ivory fine
And unstained marble into Gods, to stand
With Spartan bay leaves decking head and hand;
Their poets yet in thin sweet voice may sing,
So they will quite forget the axes' ring
Amidst the battle-song: nay sometimes still
Their men-at-arms may show their wonted skill
Amid the Spartan spears—'gainst Spartan foes,
Where nought there is to gain and all to lose.

Ah evil days! for surely may ye wot
That such as erewhile had cast in their lot
With King Aristodemus, Euphaes,
Damis, all dead and deathless memories,
In joys of slaves would have but small delight.
For them no morn of May was e'er so bright,
No eve of June so soft, that they forgat
Oaths sworn long time agone, while their king sat
Smiling with hope of battle, in his tent,
Whereto the fresh wind, laden with [the] scent
Of trodden grass, bore with it therewithal
The tumult of the far off foeman's call:
For them all eyes of women seemed grown sad,
All songs within them a lamenting had,
All children's glee reproached them with the day
When these too needs must learn what weight there lay
Upon all life in that sad land of theirs.

So passed over the land the heavy years,
Wherein none looked on daughter or fair wife
With any joy, and none but fools deemed life
To have much hope in it; but ye must know
That there were some who bode not the last blow
But fled away when hope was quite outworn;
One house amid these, ere the folk forlorn
And leaderless and 'wildered at the last

Ithome's war-beat gates wide open cast,
Since fate compelled them not to bide the end,
Into Arcadia made a shift to wend,
Since in that land dwelt others of their kin;
So they were counted worthy folk therein,
And there in honour did their old folk die,
Their young folk grow to eld, while longingly
They thought and told of the great hapless war.
Amid these days of restlessness and care,
Twenty-three years after Ithome's fall,
Unto the exiles latest wed of all
A child was born named Aristomenes,
Who grew up little caring folk to please
And little loved of all; dull in the school,
Careless but rough in boys' games, half a fool
Half dangerous folk deemed him; as he grew
Amid the fellowship of those poor few
Sons of the exiles of Ithome, they
Would mock him often, and yet day by day
Grew more to fear, casting, all the same,
Upon his shoulders more than half the blame
Of their wild deeds; for certes most of these
In that fair land were as a north-east breeze
Amid a poppy-field—so oft enow
He learned that birch twigs in Arcadia grow
Nor heeded much the knowledge: for the rest
Not over big he was, but deep of chest,
Long-armed beyond most lads, swift-foot and light,
Well-knit and lithe, full-lipped, with eyen bright
And grey as a hawk's; and ever would he be
In his attire rough and slovenly;
Silent he was and patient of all jeers
And hating feasts. So unto nineteen years
Did he attain, still deemed of all, as one
By whom would nought of any note be done;
For no least deed e'en of their rioting
Had he once led, or counselled anything;

Though he had oft been trusty instrument
To carry out some pushing fool's intent.

Now at this tide oft whiles would it befall
That these same youths would cross the mountain wall
Into Ætolia and thenceforth would take
Such things as folk not too much moan would make
Over the loss of; but on such-like days
Would Aristomenes no least voice raise
For or against; whiles would he seem to lack
Courage indeed, yea and would oft hold back
When there was most to do. Of this it came
That of these deeds was somewhat too much fame,
And for a while it scarce was good to bide
At the city for these youths, who wandering wide
Fared so that at the last it fell, their way
By the head-waters of Alpheus lay,
And high amid the goat-browsed hills they were
Mid which the homesteads were but small and rare.
So on a night with certain shepherd-folk
They guested, and arising when day broke
Fell to their food in glee: nineteen of these
Messenian youths with Aristomenes
And four Arcadian shepherds—ye may wot
That every one of them some arms had got
And were rough players for their years; sixteen
Of summers had the youngest of them seen,
The eldest three and twenty.
Now they fell
To asking these same shepherd-folk to tell
About the land south of the mountain ridge,
Where goat and thorn-bush looked like fly and midge
From the rough vale wherein they breakfasted.
Laconia lay beyond, the shepherds said,
The springs of the Eurotas rose up there
On the other side; a country good and fair
For folk, they said, and grinned, if only one

Were sprung from Hercules of yore agone.
All laughed thereat save Aristomenes,
Who by the porridge-pot was on his knees,
The steam wherefrom now well nigh hid his face.
But presently he rose up in his place,
Stammering and blushing e'en as he would speak
But found the words a long way off to seek:

The Story of Aristomenes

"Lo I have heard," quoth he, "my grandsire tell,
How these folk, these same thieves upon him fell
And had away ten horses from his field,
And from his house nine brass bowls, a gilt shield
Given to Pallas, and two handmaids fair:
Too many years agone to find them there
Did that befall; yet since we needs this tide
Must be away from our own country side,
Good pastime should I find it for my part
To bring him somewhat thence to glad his heart
Instead of these when we go back again:
Then might he deem he had not lived in vain,
If I—if his son's son should grow to be
All unafraid the light of spears to see."

Loud they laughed out; his grandsire, sooth to say,
Had been but doting for this many a day,
Remembering nought that in his time went on,
Forgetting nought of old fields lost and won:
So they were merry, mocking him a while
Who paid no heed a space, but with a smile
And grey eyes staring dreamily, looked out
Onto the misty mountain; till at last
As they beheld him, o'er them all was cast
A sense of something going to befall,
Nor did they laugh more, when around on all
He turned, and in their midst three paces made,
And in a changed voice grave and solemn said:

"Ye laugh; but I shall laugh not till it comes,
The day that sees us in our ancient homes,
Or till I am a-dying; if ye deem
My grandsire dozes through a wavering dream
Yet has he held the sword, and good methinks
It is for one who into grey eld sinks
To mind the great life that has passed away
Rather than little matters of today,
When we, being smitten, durst not e'en cry out."

They looked at one another as in doubt
If this were even he, Aristomenes,
And their hearts swelled; for few amidst of these
Knew aught of fear, only too far away
And great had Sparta seemed until today.
And therewithal he spake again and said:

"A fool ye deem me, and my words ill-weighed,
And the life good enow ye live in yet:
So may it be, and ye may well forget
If so ye will, for life lasts no great while
Nor will it skill if we lived base or vile,
Once we are dead: but are ye then so safe?
What if the Spartans one day 'gin to chafe
At this small heart of the old land living free,
Or seeming free, anigh them? Certainly
Ye are not soft or tame, well ye wot
If the Arcadians love you much or not,
Or if they fear Laconia: sooth to say
Our friends' spears even now may block the way
Behind us; at the worst of all, a space
Of merry days shall pass ere Sparta raise
Her force against us—nay now, I behold
No faint-hearts here but sturdy men and bold,
And my heart tells me whatso comes at last
That many an hour in fair hope shall be past,
And many an eve of victory shall we know;

And many a time our mere names whispered low
Down in wind-gathering hollows of the hills
Shall quell our foes, e'en as the thunder stills
The babble of the summer afternoon—
O fair Gods, lead us unto battle soon!"

He felt their gathering voices as he went
With great strides leading o'er the heathery bent,
Sword clashing against shield, till suddenly
Their shout went echoing up the valley high
Beat back from hill to hill as they arose
As men the God drives blind against their foes,
And recking nought, swift followed after him,
Watched by the shepherds till they grew all dim
In shifting haze of morning; to their sheep,
Their well-known day of toil, their dreamless sleep
These turned, half scornful, yet half longing still
For something more their empty lives to fill.

On toiled the sons of the exiles up the steep,
And early that same night were laid to sleep
Far down the southern slope; then with the day
Rose up and gazed adown, and there it lay,
The land that bred their tyrants; homestead fair,
Pasture and wood and cornland gathered there
About the hid Eurotas: orderly
And rich seemed all; and these were young to die,
Yet young to think of dying or of fear,
Or what the slow revenge of time might bear.

So downward went the youths, till the slopes grew
Wooded and tilled, and here and there a few
Of early-stirring folk they met, who fled
As though Arcadian hill-thieves they did dread;
But none made question to them, till at noon,
They passed an oak-wood heavy with the June,
And came upon a great man's house, whereby

There stood the shrine of some divinity:
Plenteous the place was, orchard, garden-close,
Rick-yard and barn spread round, and high o'er those
The pillared house, through whose court-gates flung wide
Came sound of folk at meal in hot noontide.
Great looked the place and lordly, the young men
Gazed each on each, and certainly by then
The morn's vague rashness had grown somewhat dull;
Poor seemed they in a place so plentiful,
Beardless and light-limbed by the ponderous gate.
But in their leader did the heart wax great,
Fair visions passed before him, as he said,
Like one who knew their thoughts:
"Let nought be weighed,
But all be dared today!—time later on,
When with the Gods' help great things we have won
Will we be wise: not hard now to be brave,
For in each Spartan house good friends we have,
If not our kin, yet foes of our kin's foes;
And this shall be no woeful day to those—
Men torn from home and fair life, having nought
Save the one hope to vengeance to be brought.
No words, but follow swift unto the hall!"

Into the court they passed then; down did fall
The brazen jar from off a maiden's head,
And flashed in the hot sun; a boy who led
A horse from hall to stable stopped and stared,
And durst not flee, while restless, unafeared,
The lustred doves before their swift feet brushed,
The peacock 'twixt the close-set yew-stems pushed;
Nought looked like war, as all doors round about
The band beset. But tumult and great doubt
Rose in the hall, when in the doorway there
Stood Aristomenes, his golden hair
Bright with the sun, and through the locks of it

Might men behold the noonday sunbeams flit
From spear to spear behind; great fear fell then
Upon those half-armed and unwary men;
Till over all his loud clear voice was heard.

"Men in this hall, be ye no more afeard
Than if the Gods, who sent us here, were come!
Behold, we have a will to get us home
Unto Messenia; from the Arcadian land
We come last, bearing little wealth in hand,
For ye Laconian folk our stewards are made
This many a year: so when ye down have laid
The increase of our own store, harmless we
Will go our ways; who yet this side the sea,
Yea in our fathers' fields, have mind to dwell;
Moreover on this day methinks 'twere well,
If here abide perchance folk of our kin,
Or strangers, who have found it hard to win
From out this house, that with this company
They now should wend more fields of Greece to see.
—Nay let your weapons be!—we are enough
To slay all here, if once the play wax rough;
Take life, and meet us on another day!
And whoso goeth to Sparta, let him say
That Aristomenes his eyes have seen,
Wending his way to what of old hath been
A happy land, that either he may live
Some joy to folk down-trodden there to give,
Or at the least die not without good fame!
—Now, master of this house, speak forth thy name,
And once more, if here be Messenian folk
Or strangers bowed down 'neath the Spartan yoke,
Now let them come with us, either to die
As the Gods meant them, or live happily!"

A sullen hush, mid scowl of angry brows
And clenching of hard hands; and then uprose

Glad clamour from the many bondmen there,
'Gainst whom the Spartans not a stroke might dare;
Then spake the master of the house:
"O youth,
Beardless, unknown thou art; and yet in sooth
One good day hast thou won in thy life-days,
While I, Cleombrotus, must lose the praise
That once I had, of being victorious—
—But you, scourged slaves, get forth from this my house
Where no more meat ye gorge from this day forth.
Dogs bought with money! beasts of little worth,
Dragged from our fee-farm of Messenia, go,
Lest ye tomorn the stocks and whip-cord know!—
—Take them, bold youth, and blame thyself, when they
From the first clash of steel shall flee away.
But for my wealth, if thou indeed take all
Thou takest not more than the Gods one day shall;
Lo thou, my daughter! wilt thou take her then?
One day I deem she shall bear warlike men
To fail at last, and come to misery!"

And as he spake he drew forth from his knee
A growing maiden, some twelve winters old,
Who with great eyes the stranger did behold,
Trembling, and clinging to her father's knees,
Who smiled upon her. Aristomenes
Would fain have spoken, and a threatening sound
Rose from the slaves who gathered close around;
But the lord cried:
"Thou hast begun a war
Knowing but little who thy foemen are;
And if thou thinkest thou hast gained great things
This day from me, the seed and friend of kings,
Yet shalt thou think ere thou hast gained the end
How many joys thou from the world didst send,
—My joy the first, and thine perchance the last."

Therewith back to the wall behind he cast
His right hand suddenly, and caught adown
A hunting-knife, thin-bladed, sharp and brown,
And to his own heart thrust it with sure stroke,
And fell down dead and silent; from the folk
A mingled murmur rose, and pale and wan
The little one stood gazing on the man
Greater than was the greatest man she knew.
But Aristomenes unto him drew,
Smiling, but pale and somewhat sick at heart,
And said:
"In brave wise has he played his part,
Yet better had he lived to hinder ours!
But go, ye freed Messenians, to the bowers
Where arms are stored, and raiment and good grain,
And gather from the home-fields the best gain
Of neat and sheep and horses, nor delay
Our setting forth three hours; because this day
I fain would tread on the Messenian soil.
But here shall sit these Spartans free from toil
Till we are on our way."
So here and there
Ransacked the slaves just freed, of whom there were
Some thirty men, but the Messenians stayed
Guarding the sullen home-folk: the young maid
Stood by her mother and some women, late
Come from their chambers in most sad estate,
And she wept too; but mid her sobs, no less
Gazed on the strange and new-born stateliness
Of the rough-clad Messenian, as he passed
To and fro through the hall.
And so at last
In the very hottest of that day of June,
While the great brazen trumpet's clattering tune
And clash of arms broke through the drowsy hum
Of scarce-seen things of summer, did they come
Into the courtyard, armed now gloriously,

All save their leader; therewith could they see
Out in the highway waggons tilted o'er,
The victuals and the goodly things that bore,
And further on steeds, sheep and lowing neat.
Forth went they joyous; yet with lingering feet
Out of the hall passed Aristomenes
Half sad at heart, the very last of these,
And as he passed the sun-scorched threshold o'er
Still were the maiden's eyes upon the door,
And she forgat to weep till he was gone.

Bright on the temple now the hot sun shone
As through the gates the little army went;
And Aristomenes with fresh intent
Cried out to halt, and asked one of the stead
Who dwelt therein; who with a glad face said
It was the God of War; then did they take
A black bull for the hopeful omen's sake,
And as they might they sacrificed him there.
Well dight the pillared shrine was, and most fair;
And just before the image of the God
There hung upon a fair-wrought brazen rod
A goodly helm bedight with silver wings,
A mail-coat wrought as for the best of kings,
And a great shield, thereon an eagle made
Whose wings outspread the golden ground did shade.
Then told a homeman how these arms were won
At Stenyclerus in the days agone,
In that last fight when the Messenians broke
And fled away a feeble hopeless folk.
So therewithal cried Aristomenes:

"O thou great God, if thou wilt give me these,
Somewhat I deem I yet may give to thee;
Yet will I wear them not, until I see
My foemen's backs, when sevenfold more than mine
I count them."

Either the June sun did shine
Brighter than erst, or else the altar fire
Red flickering in the white sun shot up higher,
Or Ares' face gleamed, answering the face
Of Aristomenes, who from its place
Took down that gear, and bore it to a wain
And cast it in. Then sang the horn again,
Men leaped to saddle, creaked the wain-wheels, lowed
The sullen herd, and from the thirsty road
Into the green trees rolled the cloud of dust
As westward went that handful, in fair trust
Of Aristomenes, new breathed upon
By that old spirit that great fields had won—
—And he in trust that Fate would make no end
Till o'er the world some tale his name should send.

HOW THEY CAME TO MESSENIA

SO rose the little cloud like a man's hand
Upon Laconia, spreading, till the land
Was wet with drenching of that evil shower.

Down sank the great sun now from hour to hour
As steadily they went unto the west,
Showing no force 'gainst any for the rest,
Nor seeming aught, if any drew anear,
But Spartans by their riding and their gear.
Good speed they made, for they had some who knew
How best to pierce the tangled valleys through,
And so before the ending of the day
They gat them through a certain narrow way
Betwixt the hills, and, coming out of it,
Beheld the kites sweep and the swallows flit
Against the grey cliffs with the sun still bright,
And down below a land of all delight
Green with June not yet weary: then the guide,

Who ever went by the young leader's side,
Turned to his smooth fresh face his careworn eyes,
And said:
"O godlike youth, the Gods are wise
To dull our memory, since they will that we
Should live on still: so has it fared with me
That mid my daily pain and daily fear,
I had forgotten what we gaze on there,
The sweet land of Messenia."
Then that word,
Said low in the soft eve, their hearts so stirred
That sounds without a meaning and strange tears
Broke from them, amid thoughts of all the years
Wherein alternate hope and fear had played
With their dead fathers, and the deeds now made
Songs for the Spartan children: there a space
They lingered, gazing on the pleasant place
From the grey pass; till Aristomenes
Cast up his sword into the evening breeze,
And caught it falling, and cried:
"Praise to you,
O Gods that ye have given me deeds to do,
And days to do them in, and for an end
No dream of vain things whatso Fate may send!"

Then all cried out for joy, and down they went
Unto the lower land, till 'neath a bent
They saw where lay a homestead grey-roofed, long;
Thither they turned, and still the herdsman's song
Going to fold at day's end, or the voice
Of youths and maids who ever must rejoice
With the mere joy of living, sank and died
As, turning, they beheld these fellows ride
In Spartan wargear; close shrank child and maid
Unto the grey stone well-shaft as afraid,
When nigher still they drew; by the garth-gate
The unarmed door-wards scowled with helpless hate,

And as their spears the trim wall overtopped
The piper mid the light-limbed dancers stopped
His pipe as pleasant as the morning bees
Within the limes: but Aristomenes
Smiled as if glad, and much they wondered then
To see the rough lad leading steel-clad men
With such proud mien, and some folk murmured low,
"What mumming will the cursed thieves make now
To grind us lower yet?" But on he rode
And smote upon the door of that abode,
That opened almost even ere his blow,
And there an old man stood, with hair of snow,
Flushed face and wrathful eyes, who cried:
"Why then,
Come ye to shear the shorn, O Spartan men?
These are your own fields that we dwell upon,
When all is wasted then is your wealth gone
As well as our poor lives."
The youth leapt down
Unto the earth, and 'neath the elder's frown
Smiled joyously, and scarce for joy could cry:
"Help for Messenia, father, ere thou die!
—Come now and tell me what young men are here
Who with stout heart may carry sword or spear
Nor faint when foes are many!"
The old man
Stood there with open mouth and cheeks grown wan
And stared at him a while, then stammering said:
"What is thy name then? Come ye from the dead
That ye must name Messenia as a thing
To help or fight for? As of a great king
Thy voice is and thine eyes, despite thy gear;
Mock not an old man in his last ill year!"

"Well, like a mock it seems that I should strive,
E'en with this handful, happy days to give
Unto the beat-down land," he said; "yet sooth

So dying shall I crown a happy youth
With no ill end—Yea, but I will prevail:
Beseems it not a god-helped man to fail;
And such as ye behold me in this place,
I spring from Æpitus of ancient days."

Then mid the ring of spears the old man cried:
"Ah is it so that my dream hath not lied?
Now may the rest come after—Come ye in,
And if your cheer tonight be poor and thin
Yet may we look to mend it on a tide
When 'neath us lies the Spartan country-side:
Since of your tidings somewhat do I guess."

Then through the door in did the young men press,
The home-folk gathered round much wondering,
While still the old man cried for many a thing,
To spread the boards, to fold the new-come neat,
To bring the strangers water for their feet
And garlands for their heads, and so at last
Into the hall both guests and home-folk passed
And feasted as they might with plenteous glee,
Though small wealth there indeed there was to see
Of aught but roughest things; but maidens' eyes
Made the bright blood to many a cheek arise
Mid the new comers; sweet it seemed to give
New hope of life, new hope for love to live
To such as these; like very Gods they felt
As though to a great world weal and woe they dealt.

But now the goodman did for silence cry,
And Aristomenes spoke out on high
And told the hope and good hap of that morn,
Saying moreover,
"Lo, into the corn
The hook is thrust, but further than our eyes
May see, the unshorn field before us lies.

Surely I think that we shall one day rest
And look behind, those who have not been blest
With death before the victory; yet meanwhile
With no soft words will I your hearts beguile:
Hard are the years wherein we have to deal
With a proud folk, an unbowed commonweal;
Ye who draw swords now, for no holiday
I lead you forth, nor for a while to play
That ye may sleep the sounder, that your loves
May kiss you sweeter in the olive groves.
Nay, amid ruin a God must each become
With stern face watching wrack within his home;
Unthought-of horrors must he look to find,
A fresh pain drifting nigher on each wind,
Fresh fear, if he could fear, in every breath
Made into words; no love but such as death
May make not pale unto his lips shall stoop,
No hope but such as hopeth against hope:
Is it too great to bear?—Yet shame and scorn
Ye slay, so bearing this—But yestermorn
I, who speak this as if the fire of Jove
The boy's heart in my breast did verily move,
Knew nought whereat I aimed, why I did yearn,
And now within me such a light doth burn
As shall light up in Sparta faces pale
With listening to a still increasing tale—
—A flame to last till death comes—yea in sooth
E'en this same morn was I a hot-head youth
Who thought to do my deed and get away,
Laughing an hour at all the disarray
Of Spartan grey-beards—now I know that I
Am driven on by some divinity
To free the land, and none shall stay me now!"

So godlike did the visage of him grow
As thus he spake, that men's hearts in them swelled,
And when he made an end from out them welled

A great cry glad and strong and terrible,
And on all folk a godlike courage fell.
But the old man called mid the noise and stir
His five sons to him, and said:
"Lo ye hear
How the Gods have remembered us; haste now
And get to saddle, and these tidings show
Wide through the land to every trusty man,
And bid none loiter if so be he can
Set foot before foot, but be here ere noon
Tomorrow, for doubt not that over soon
Shall Sparta be upon us."
Therewithal
To one or two more did his kinsmen call
And went their ways, and then the goodman said:

"Hearken fair friends: last night upon my bed
I slept and dreamed, and lo a dead friend came
Unto me and said, 'Damis, name the name
Most famous amid all Messenian folk!'
A sigh methought from out my heart there broke
As I named Euphaes: 'Nay long agone,'
He said, 'he went with many another one
Unto the dead; seest thou my face, how bright
It is now; shall a beaten ghost delight
This heart that loves Messenia mid the dead?'
Methought I fell a-trembling then, and said:
'Nay, by the holy things that thou and I
Buried in Ira's midmost secretly
Ere the last fight, tell me what thing is this!'
He said, 'E'en now an eagle flying is
From out Arcadia, let him not fly lone—'
And into the dimness straightway was he gone
Leaving the name unspoken; but I woke
Struggling with memories of the bygone folk,
The last hours of Ithome; and how he
The prophet [Theoclus] bade that man and me

Bury the holy things of Jove deep down
Amid the dusk of Ira's woods unsown:
'Which things once hid,' quoth he, 'ye shall not stir,
Till of the living from the dead ye hear,
And from the eyrie of Arcadia fly
Jove's bird to bring our people victory.'
—And now meseems I am not grown too old
To go to Ira: yea, a fair stronghold
Meet for our purpose shall ye find the same,
A place where a great host need scarce think shame
E'en by a band like thine to be long stay'd.
Moreover thither may we well have aid
From out Arcadia, lying close indeed
Unto its marches: good for every need
The country is around, nor may ye face
The hosts of Sparta save in such a place,
Until we gather force that may avail;
Yea, and get arms too, for a weary tale
It is to tell of all the ransacking
In every stead for any warlike thing.
Yet is there left indeed a spear and sword
In this my house, because my well-hid hoard
Has 'scaped the thieves of Sparta. Now one cup
Unto our first fight, and then stand we up
And for departing all things here array.
Glad shall I be to see the winding way
Dimmed by the dust-cloud that our hoofs shall raise;
And though I see not one of all those days
When in this house unfeared my kin shall sit,
Yet doubt I nought about the end of it."

Amid the clatter and the joyous sound
That rose up as the cup of oaths went round
Sat Aristomenes, as though a dream
Had come on him unwares; all things did seem
Too little and too hopeless for a while
A wise man into striving to beguile;

But then, remembering what great toil there lay
Betwixt him and the coming of the day
When all attained should leave him nought to hope,
With what a world of troubles he must cope
Ere he could turn about to weigh the worth
Of all the deeds men do upon the earth,
He smiled and stretched his hand out for the cup
And as amid the clamour he stood up,
And drank in silence, to his eyes there came
A kind grave look, as though he knew no shame
And mid the day's work had no time to scoff;
All querulous curses and all dreams fell off
From his fair soul, that great his name might grow.

So in the fair eve were they busy now
By wain and byre, nor slept they much that night,
And long ere the first breaking of the light
Men 'gan to gather to the stead, and when
The sun was fully up, on many men
Full-flushed with hope his rays fell: then a band
Of chosen youths pushed onward through the land
Toward Ira for the clearing of the way;
And ere the midmost of the troubled day
Old Damis the main body of them led
From out the cleared deserted ancient stead,
Nor once turned back his cheery face to gaze
Upon the ruin of the well-loved place,
For still behind stayed Aristomenes
Watching the dust-cloud float above the trees
As through the vale they wound; now a great train
Where wife and child and beast and laden wain
Made the spears seem but scanty: so when he
No more mid that moving cloud could see
The steel a-glittering, round he turned and bade
His men to work, who, falling to there, made
Such wrack of the empty stead as might be done
Without fire-raising.

Low had fallen the sun
Before he cried to horse; then with grave face,
As one grown old untimely, from that place
He turned the last of all men, and his heart,
Brave as it was, scarce seemed to have a part
In all the eager hopes of yestermorn,
So sad a courage in his soul was born,
As swiftly through the o'erworn windless day
He and his folk toward Ira went their way.

HOW THEY MADE A STRONGHOLD ON THE HILL OF IRA

IN a great hollow of the mountain slopes,
Where toward the south the woodland country droops,
This hog-backed spur of Ira lies, that falls
On every side save toward the mountain walls,
Whereto a ridge there runneth; thick thereon
The unsown pine-woods stand, and scarce had shone
The sun upon the soil there, till the sound
Of the shrill pipe pierced the dim dusk around
This morn, and midst its eager melody
Broad axe and glittering bill were swung on high.

A little way as you go lower down
With oak-woods are the hillsides overgrown,
And then begins the tillage; fair enow
Among the orchards doth the barley grow
Now yellowing for the scythe; on terraces
The vine is trellised, and grey olive-trees
Spread cloudlike o'er the slopes—A noble land,
A happy place, if still man's grasping hand
Itched not for more and more, and e'en when full
Of rest and life, found not the days grow dull
Without he make some story for the folk,

Who, his days past, are writhing 'neath the yoke
Of sorrows that they may not understand.
Ah, a good place, a fair and hopeful land
For these new-comers!—fast now falls the axe,
No blast of horn the swine-filled forest lacks,
And Aristomenes rides far and wide,
And gathers up from all the country side
Both men and goods; and from Arcadia come
Wild men and runaways to make their home
On Ira; but the Arcadian commonwealth
Will make nor meddle yet, although by stealth
Some great men send them arms and such-like gear.
Nor camplike dwelt these long, for you may hear
The hammers and the saws at work day-long,
And sill and strut and upright rising strong
E'en in the places where as trees they grew
A while agone. And still, though the year drew
Round unto autumn and the fields were shorn,
Unto the place no tidings were there borne
Of Sparta stirring; yea though twice or thrice
In the Laconian fields did flame arise
From homesteads plundered. And yet no less grave
Or watchful were the leaders. "We shall have
The heavier storm," quoth Damis, "when it breaks,
For these folk play for nought but heavy stakes,
And care not for a plundered farm or twain
To risk an army beaten home again!"

So it befell on a fair autumn day,
While yet in hollows of the mountains lay
The white mist, and the apple fell adown
Through the still air, amidmost their new town
Folk gathered round about the fane new wrought,
And unto Jove the best they might do brought,
Fruit, flowers and worthy beasts; but midst of these,
By Damis led and Aristomenes,
There came a company of maidens fair

Fresh-clad and flower-crowned, who aloft did bear
Shut in a brazen ark the holy things.
Few men were there who then felt less than kings,
As pressing after these, whom hope did move
Amid the flutter of their hearts to love
E'en though they knew it not, through the wide door
They went into their temple rude and poor,
And twixt bright heads and well wrought shoulders saw
The old man's quivering eager thin hands draw
From out the ark Jove's image silver-wrought,
Black with the damp of years but harmed in nought,
And other twain of Helen's brothers bright,
And thin gold plates figured with words of might
Few men could read now; and the empty car
Of the Mighty Mother wrought with gem and star:
Yea their hearts swelled, for these they knew indeed
Had heard the crying of their fathers' need
While yet Ithome stood.

Back now a space
The maidens fell, and their young leader's face
Bright and yet solemn they beheld now turn
To where the new-lit altar flame did burn;
Clad still he was in his rough peasant gear,
Yet a world's weal his shoulders seemed to bear,
So noble was he, as he cried:

"O Jove,
If anywise a mortal man may move
Thy heart that rules all, grant to us who bring
These holy things here, that so longed-for thing
They erst heard prayed for, victory and good peace
For this their land: new weal and fresh increase,
This second thing some folk of Thee might pray,
And yet not I, because I know today,
It shall not fail us at the worst to die
Unshamed and striving still for victory:
Hearken the third thing then, and grant that soon
I and all these may learn with what a tune

The Spartan spears clash on the Spartan shields,
When their King's tents rise fair above the fields!"

Loudly the people shouted as he spake,
And through the press therewith the priests did break,
Leading the gilt-horned milk-white wreathed bull;
But ere the echo of that shout grew dull,
Ere the priest's axe fell, came another sound
Of horse-hoofs beating on the stony ground.
Then on all men, and wherefore they knew not,
Great awe and silence fell; and they forgot
Their very lives and what they came to do,
As the press fell asunder, and there drew
Up to the altar two men great of growth,
Fair with the fairness of the prime of youth,
Bright-haired, gold-clad, and wonderful, alike
As coins just minted one same die doth strike,
Who in one voice sent forth a mighty cry,
Awful but sweet with untold melody:

"What do ye here, Messenians, when your foes
Are treading down fair meadows and green close
About Andania, laughing as they tell
The woes that to their slaves of old befell,
Portioning out your women to the great
Of their great men? Be swift, and they shall wait
Your coming, for a lost and feeble folk
They deem you, waiting tamely for the stroke!
Be swift, for surely on this autumn night
The waxing moon shall give enow of light
To guide your feet 'twixt dying men and dead!"

Some were there who heard not the words they said
Amidst their awe, but said the thunder crashed
Through the soft cloudless sky, and weapons clashed
A long way off; but Aristomenes
Stood with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, facing these

As one who hearkens, till they turned them round
And down the street again the hoofs did sound.
Then he cried out:
"Heard ye their promise then,
Shall not this evening make us more than men?
Fair hope, sweet life! whatever comes henceforth
Surely our lives shall seem now something worth.
Out, out and arm! Let us be swiftly gone,
For they do well on whom these twain have shone,
The Dioscuri—O fellows, arm and out!"

All folk gave answer with a joyous shout
As their hearts came again, and, all being done
That they must needs do to the Highest One,
Men cast away their garlands and soft gear
And from their loves' hands took the shield and spear,
And soon with few words and in fair array
Were wending down the leaf-strewn woodland way,
A little band indeed, but well knit, strong
In hardy hearts and memories of all wrong.

OF THEIR FIRST BATTLE

NO long tale of that fight there is to tell;
Through byways led most secretly and well
Upon the Spartan camp unwares they came
Just as the sun set, and a night of shame
Was that for Sparta: scarcely here and there
A few brave men had heart to raise a spear
'Gainst their old slaves, the dregs of the Great War.
Adown the valley fled they fast and far
Long after all pursuit of them was stayed:
Short of Laconia might they have no aid,
For Stenyclerus shut her gates, when they
A drifting rout drew thither in the grey
Of the autumn dawn; and ere their rearward passed

They heard upon the haze the old cry cast
From her high towers, and saw the just-risen sun
Light the old banners from the temples won.
So on they slunk, to have rude greeting when
They met the women and the ancient men
Of that proud Sparta.
Aristomenes
Abode that night among the cut-down trees
And trampled fields wherein the gained camp lay,
But sent a messenger at break of day
To make all Ira joyful, and withal
Led his few folk within Andania's wall,
Not knowing that the rout was all so great:
But ere the sun had come to his full heat
True tidings had he, and from many a place
Poured in the folk, flushed and in joyous case,
To tell him of the freeing of the land,
And praying for some weapon to their hand.
Amidst the Council-hall he sat, and heard
Their wild joy, and within his heart there stirred
Strange pity for the blind delight of men,
And he bethought him of the old days, when
E'en such-like hope, such joy in war, filled hearts
That long ago played to an end their parts,
Nor ere the last rest failed to know despair.
Yet since the present day was e'en so fair
He was glad too, nor trembled at his gain
E'en as he feared no whit the utmost pain
His life might chance to bring.
Now soon was come
Glad message back from Ira, that the home
Of the old valour of their folk, the hill
Of dear Ithome, would be better still
As meeting-place for folk made free and glad
Than any stead the fair land had;
And men from Stenyclerus came to say
The selfsame words; whereon he sent that day

Wide through the land, and bade come thereinto
Whoso might deem that he had aught to do
With ruling of the land, upon a tide
He and his named. Nor did he bide
Long idle at Andania: the next morn
He rose up ere the dark was quite outworn,
And bearing with him those fair arms that he
Won in Laconia, went full silently
Unto a shrine of Mars upon the wall,
And silent mid the warder's slow footfall
There he arrayed himself in these; then said:

"O dreadful God, if ever I had prayed
For happy life, or quiet days, or e'en
Short life and peaceful death, then had it been
But mockery on my body these to bear
Wrought in thine honour so exceeding fair.
But when they lay a man on his last bed
With fairest raiment do they deck the dead,
And even so it fares with me today:
Scarce were I lonelier now, if far away
My soul were gone, my body laid at rest:
Yet do I deem well I have chosen the best
When I look round upon the lives of men
And the vain dreams, dreamed o'er and o'er again,
Waked from with anguish, blindly sought for still.
No need to ask thee if I do thy will,
No need to ask thee to abide by me
To look upon my doings that shall be,
Since fate has marked me body and soul to bear
The loneliness, the sternness and the care
That do these deeds, the failure and the shame
And—when my soul can feel no more—the fame
That men must needs desire. See, I go
In a few hours e'en such a deed to do
As Thou, O God, shalt think me marked thereby
To be thine own."

He turned and pensively
Paced up and down the rampart for a space,
Till others 'gan to stir about the place
Besides the warders: then he bade to horse,
And, leaving there the more part of the force
Gathered about Andania, rode his ways
With a chosen band.
Old folk in after days,
When all was fallen unto nought again,
Telling the story of their struggle vain,
Would feel their hearts beat quicker as they told
Of his grey eyes beneath his hair of gold
That dreamy morn; then like a tale come true
Told of the Gods it seemed, that one should do
Such deeds and be so fair, so strong to save,
And yet so kind-eyed, smiling and yet grave
As though with deep insight, as round about
Rang the glad voices of folk free from doubt
And soft with new found bliss; as wife or maid
Went on their way rejoicing to have laid
Hand on the skirts of him or to have touched,
It might be, the brown hand that erewhile clutched
The pitiless sword that woke anew that strife
Amid whose clashing failed so many a life.

HOW ARISTOMENES SAW SPARTA AND CAME TO ITHOME

THROUGHOUT the countryside that day he rode
And stayed awhile at every fair abode
He passed, that he might know how the land fared,
And to give arms and counsel: still he heard
Of no foes nigh, and all the people seemed
As though the end now fully gained they deemed;
Feasting and joy he looked on everywhere;

For now the maiden might be slim and fair
Nor make her lover tremble and look round,
When in the wood they walked, at every sound
He did not know: the goodman now might praise
His sleek-skinned herd nor fear his voice to raise:
Folk drank from silver now, nor feared to dine
With their halls done about with hangings fine.
On all of whom would Aristomenes
Cast neither doubt nor fear to break their ease
But praised what arms they had and gave them more,
And bade them give good heed unto the lore
Their fathers had in such things, and to deem
That women loved the clatter and the gleam
Of sword and shield, and bade them still to strive
As free men ready for the fight to live:
And unto all he seemed a God indeed,
A man to help them at their utmost need.

About the ending of the second day
He stayed his band anigh the mountain-way
That threading rough Taygetus cometh down
Upon Eurotas and the lordly town
Where dwelt the Spartans; just in Spartan land
They pitched their tents, and there he gave command
That they till noon of the next day should bide
And do no hurt unto the countryside:
"But me," he said, "the Gods call otherwhere;
And if so be that I should chance to fare
The longest and the latest road of all,
Think no great harm thereof; for that shall fall
That the Fates will: and verily I think
If all our folk 'neath fire and steel should sink,
Of these dry straws ye gather for a bed
The Fates would fashion warriors in their stead
To quell Laconia. Have no care for me,
But rest in peace, for good days shall ye see!"

Therewith from off him his fair helm he did,
And with a homespun coat his armour hid,
And took an ill-wrought and rough-shafted spear
Such as a shepherd 'gainst the wolf might bear
And pulled a hood over his face, then went
Unto the gear that lay before his tent
And took a bundle from it, that might be
Some wicked thing for all that folk could see,
Then backed a horse rough-groomed but strong & tall,
And as the shadows of the hills 'gan fall
Their longest, jogged on slowly up the pass
That led to Sparta. A soft eve it was,
But from the south the clouds were gathering now
'Neath a light wind, and as the dark did grow,
So grew they till a drizzling undersky
Hid moon and stars, and all the wind did die,
Though rather grey than black the night was still
As slowly onward, betwixt hill and hill,
Amid the noises of the night, he passed,
Meeting few folk at first, and none at last
For a long while: once on the silence broke
From somewhere nigh the noise of feasting folk,
And blurred lights gleaming wide could he espy.
Once heard he cows low from some shed, so nigh
That trampling of the horses too he heard;
And once a shepherd, mocking some night-bird
And answered by his dog; and on he rode
Through the dank drizzling night with little load
Upon his heart, thinking of matters great.

And now he deemed indeed the night grew late,
And once or twice he drew rein, for it seemed
That somewhat glimmered far off, that he deemed
The water whereof did his foemen drink,
The white Eurotas, till the dream would shrink
And all be grey and empty; till at last
When down-hill sleepily he long had passed,

Close by a sudden light broke on his eyes
And a black gable shadow-like did rise
In the grey night, and in the road near by
Were other shadows moving silently
Whence here and there steel glimmered: the long street
Dimly he saw beyond, as he did meet
The watch of Sparta: for belike ye know,
Their glory and their might the more to show,
Unwalled the town was of this haughty folk.

So from the watch the word of challenge broke
As they his horse-hoofs heard; with clownish shout
He answered them, and now with little doubt
They dealt with him when in their midst he came,
Making small question of his place or name,
But of the tidings from the west would know.
God wot he did not spare therewith to show
Strange things enough to them and portents dire,
Saying moreover he had seen the fire
Spread o'er Laconia, that a mighty band
Of the Messenians harried all the land,
That the Arcadian and the Elian kings
Were come to help, and many such-like things;
The which in surly wrath they took: then he
Asked them in turn where might the dwelling be
Of Jove's priest, for thereunto would he wend;
They bade him go unto the great street's end
Where he should see the temple, and near by
The priest dwelt in the marble house on high.

So forth he passed, and coming to the place
Its mighty pillars through the dusk could trace
And all was silent round: no stay at all
He made but gat him o'er the boundary wall
Struggling with hand and knee: then looking round
Slowly he passed the tree-set holy ground
Nor yet saw aught; so going on again

He passed the hushed porch of the mighty fane,
And came to the inner place, where burned aloft
A glimmering lamp: again with footsteps soft
He went about, but there was no one there.
Then to the feet of great Jove's image fair
He went, and gazed on His dim face awhile,
Then stooping down he undid with a smile
The bundle he had brought, and therefrom drew
A mail-coat, glittering and well-wrought and new
But stained with blood; a crested helm cleft down,
And a fair shield whereon a lion brown
Was wrought upon a ground of ruddy gold.
And therewithal a scroll did he unfold
Whereon was written:

Aristomenes,
O Dweller mid the Spartans, gives thee these;
Since little gifts henceforward shall they have
Of such to give thee, O Thou strong to save:
Take the first-fruits of the Messenian sword,
And spare thou not to be a gracious lord
To those who fear not aught and hate not thee!

So then the arms he bare up reverently
And laid them at Jove's feet, and thereupon
The scroll well writ; then turning gat him gone
And out into the street, and found his beast,
And went his ways again. Down in the east
The light spread now; day dawned, the rain was o'er
When to the warders' post he came once more,
Shifting his sword in such a wise that he
Might come unto the handle easily,
And smiling as a man that makes a jest
Unto himself: but now unto their rest
The more part of the guard was gone, but four
Were there on foot; who stood his path before
And bade him stand, wherewith the foremost said:

"Thy debts in the good town are swiftly paid;
Where goest thou, churl?"
"Spartan fool, stand off,"
Said he, "more business hast thou than to scoff
Good men and true!"
"What business," said he, "then?"
Handling his spear.
"To stand and fight like men,"
Said Aristomenes, "not flee away,
As the tale goes ye fled the other day."

Another drew nigh: "Speak thy name out, thou,
That we may tell whom we are slaying now."

He laughed, but ugly eyes were in his head
And "pull him down" the other warders said.

Swiftly the hero with his left hand smote
The man before him, drawing from his coat
His naked sword that, whirled about him now,
Dread and strange in the dripping morn did show,
As his freed horse sprang forward; low he bent,
Laughing aloud, as o'er his head there went
The streak of the white spear; then he turned about
In his saddle crying midst their wrathful shout:

"Heed well the name of Aristomenes;
Because in vain ye pray the Gods for ease
Till he is but a name, though unforgot."

Tumult there was and scattering arrow-shot
That harmed him nought; the echo of his name
Like an ill dream to folk just wakened came,
As in hot haste half-armed the Spartans ran
To horse; but saw no more the godlike man
Till they had fain not seen him.
On he sped

Through the fresh morn, and scarce knew more of dread
Than the light clouds above him, wondering still—
—As swiftly he pressed on 'twixt hill and hill,
Passing a homestead here, and there a bridge,
And here a turret-marked grey mountain-ridge—
What he was thinking of when yesternight
He passed these same things hidden from his sight.
Good will and heart he had to turn about
Fair word unto the staring hind to shout;
Good will to smile on the short-kirtled maid
Who shrank with shaded eyes and half afraid
Against the rock that hedged the narrow road;
Good will to snatch from off the waggon's load
A handful of the sweet close-lying hay;
Good heart to rise in stirrups when the way
Grew dark with the oak-boughs and to snatch adown
Acorn and deep-cut leaf a-growing brown;
Good heart to sing a snatch of some old song
Learned in the days before he thought of wrong.

And so at last his pace he needs must slack,
And, drawing rein high up, he looked aback
And saw none following him; then on he passed
At slower pace, and reached his folk at last,
Who with great joy made tremulous with fear
Received him, as he cried that all might hear:

"Ill-built is Sparta for a great abode;
Amid their chiefest street, God wot, the road
Is roughly paved: small houses are therein;
Eurotas' bridge is ugly, old and thin:
When we have won the place, mid days of ease
There will we build us nobler palaces
And fairer temples than this morn I saw."

Then laughing, as about him they did draw
With wondering faces, did he tell them all,

And trembling triumph on their hearts did fall
And trust in such a man their hosts to lead.

In fair wise did his careful journey speed
Throughout the land now; to the sea he came
The second day, and there he heard the fame
Of his last deed: whereby the merchants said
The Spartan folk were smitten with strange dread
More than men might have looked for; wide about
He went thence through the land and met no doubt
Or hanging-back as yet: and on the day
Appointed reached Ithome; tents there lay
Before it on the plain, both rich and rude,
For there was come so great a multitude,
That the burg, dwindling for this many a year,
Fell short of house-room for their lodging there.

But when the rumour spread that he was come
Unto the entry of their Kings' old home,
How did folk run together in his way,
And there with tears that nought of shame would stay,
And cries like sobs, and words they never knew
That they could speak, worship the strong and true,
As up the steep his folk wound to the gate
Broke open in the days made desolate
Despite of such as he. He turned about
And 'twixt the spears gazed back upon that rout
When 'neath the shadow of the gate he was,
And far below he saw the light clouds pass
Over a quiet land, made ready now
For winter's rest: then to his broad high brow
There came a troubled look, and he grew pale,
Either with memory of the long-past tale,
Or wild forebodings of the tale to come—
—And therewithal Ithome had him home.

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE MADE ARISTOMENES A KING

ITHOME hath an ancient counsel-hall,
Where you might now see places on the wall
Reft of their carven work by hammers long
Made rust themselves, and quiet from all wrong;
In its walls' compass ghosts of hopes and fears
Stood thick if one might see them; and past years,
That seemed once as they ne'er would pass away
Because of all the woe that on them lay,
Made it a solemn place for all the sun
That lit it now when there in morn half done
Stood Aristomenes, mid greybeards who
The sweet from bitter now no longer knew,
Yet knew that they were glad; amid their sons
Who long ago, as frightened little ones
Had hearkened talk of all despair, and came
In after years to know what meant the shame
And wretchedness they then heard talked about;
Amid their sons' sons, youths without a doubt
That nought they needed now but new-forged steel
To beat adown the Spartan commonweal
Once and for ever: o'er the breath of joy
High up he stood—But like a glittering toy
Made for the hour that tide unto him seemed
A full half of their courage: his eye gleamed
With fire of deeds to do, as he unrolled
Their chances, like a tale that has been told
Already. As one reading from a book
Of certain fate he spake, and bade them look
On each side of the glittering height whereon
They stood now, deeming everything well won,
And note how black the worst was, and how grey
The very best, chequered with evil day
Repulse and hope deferred. Yet even so
Stronger and brighter seemed their hope to glow;

Belike his voice more than his words they heard
Seeing him standing there so unafeared,
So strong, so far above them, and must think
How can it be that we shall ever sink
To drag him down? Silent at last he smiled,
And to himself he said: Joy hath beguiled
Their blind hearts that they look not to the end—
And that indeed I pray the Gods to send
Kindly upon them, that they may not rue
The day they trusted me; for kind and true
The hearts of these are, neither do I think
That folk shall come to hate me, though they shrink
As I shall shrink not.

But e'en therewithal
A messenger there came into the hall
Who cried aloud, that, come unto the gate,
Folk from Arcadia for their will did wait
To wot if they might have good hearing now
Of the chief men, for great things would they show.
So they were bidden in, and straightway came,
A great train; many of them known by name
To the young chief, whom now they did behold
With no small marvel. Fair gleamed out the gold
On robe and head of them, for they were clad
As though great dealings with great Kings they had,
Not with the unruly shockhead youth that they
Awhile ago would pass by in the way
Warily, in good sooth, and yet with scorn:
Since certes then tomorrow was unborn.

Amidst all these and with a strange sharp gleam
Of the past days that so far off did seem,
The chief's eyes met the bright eyes of a youth
Who smiled up at him, e'en as if in truth
Those days had been no dream; slim and right fair
He was to look on, eager-faced, his hair
Twixt brown and golden, and his eyes brown too;

Too great a man's son was he erst to do
Much in the worst deeds that those youths had done,
Yet in their company did he count one,
And was much honoured; [Bion was] his name
And of a great Arcadian house he came.
Ever he seemed a youth of gentle ways
And kindly, and would go about to praise
Rough Aristomenes e'en as he might,
And do his utmost, wrongs of his to right,
And as one pained would put off mocks from him.

A little while the hero's eyes waxed dim,
As though regret had not all left his soul,
But upward then a mighty shout did roll
Shaking the dusty beams to welcome these,
For sure folk deemed they brought their cause increase.
Then spake the first man of them:
"Friends made free,
Good men of fair Messenia, here with me
I bear a message from the Arcadian land,
So tell me prithee to whose ear or hand
I shall deliver it; which saith no less
Than that our folk behold your happiness
With joy for you, and knowing therewithal
That Sparta doth but wait her time to fall
Upon Arcadia, fain the time would take
Ere it is flown, and with your stout hearts make
Trusty alliance both in fold and field
That each to each may be fair sword and shield
'Gainst Sparta. If ye deem the offer good,
Not long we greybeards shall rub hood 'gainst hood
And talk of what shall be: certes I think
In the good town I heard the hammers clink
On other gear than cooking-pots; and sooth
About the streets was many a likely youth
Who in his sister's hands had left the crook."

Again in answer the old rooftree shook
And then old Damis stood forth and did cry
For silence, and a little company
Of elders was behind him; in his hand
Somewhat he held silk-covered, and a wand
Silk-covered too: he said:
"Arcadian friends,
With great strides in these later days time wends;
For your good will, O neighbours, certainly
We looked, but wotted not when we should see
The word ye bring: so are we met today
The greatest weight upon one head to lay,
And are the gladder ye are witnesses
To this our will. O Aristomenes,
Too full the days are filled with weighty things
That we should beat about to find us Kings
If no one here were by so much the best
That we a kingless company might rest;
But now nought have we got to choose at all
For on thine head the power of Jove doth fall
Will we or will we not: of royal seed
Thou art; stretch forth thine hand then in our need
O child of Æpitus, and take this crown
And staff that 'neath the moon I dug deep down
In Ira on that night of all despair!
Nought is it that the things are rich and fair,
Little that they are hallowed by the touch
Of brave men dead; nay hardly is it much
That with them go the worship and the trust
Of all our hearts: we do but as we must."

Amid the thundering shout that followed then
He raised aloft before the eyes of men
A gemmed crown glistening, and an ivory rod,
Gold-bound and meet it seemed for any God,
That once had swayed Messenia; Bion felt
His heart beat quick and high, as his friend dwelt

Smiling a moment, with an unchanged cheek
And merry eye, waiting till he might speak.
At last he stooped adown and from his feet
Lifted his bright steel helm, and cried:
"O sweet,
To think that I this day am well beloved,
To think that through me this great folk is moved
To freedom and to glory! nor say I
But I may hold this sceptre verily
In days to come: if ye shall need me then
When ye are living free and peaceful men
With nought to fear; as surely as I deem
That in those days to most folk I shall seem
Worth no reward but love for that wherein
I loved my folk—but now is all to win—
Look you that headpiece that ye show me now,
Is it as meet a thing to ward the blow
Of Sparta, as thing that glitters too
When dint of sword shakes off the morning dew?
This ivory staff ye offer, will it hold
Nor fall atwain when rank 'gainst rank is rolled,
Like this—that no unhandy smith hath made,
Pommel and hilts and guard and shapely blade?"

The helm was on his head now, and the sword
Gleamed in his right hand as he spake the word,
A God new-born he seemed to all that tide,
As from amid the tumult a voice cried:

"Name thine own name then; we are nought but thine;
Whate'er folk call thee shalt thou be divine!
How shall we speak against thee?"
"O fair friends,"
He said, "till all the war and trouble ends,
Till my life ends—if so be while I live
Aught for your need these hands this heart may give—
Call me the Captain of your Hosts; and gaze

With such looks on me in those other days
When all seems tottering—that we may not part
Save by the stroke of death!"
From every heart
Forth leapt the cry, "Hail Captain of our Host!"
And o'er the upturned faces, weapons tossed
Gleamed in the white sun. Then the Captain turned
Unto the guests:
"Sirs," said he, "ye have learned
How this folk trusts my youth—but for your part
Doubt not that ye are dear unto our heart
And that we hope great things from this your aid.
Now by my counsel were all due things paid
Unto the Gods, the oaths ye came to swear
Sworn fittingly: then to speech fall we here
That we [may] know all wisdom that ye have,
Since mighty things, meseems, there are to save."

So to Jove's temple through the press they went
In solemn wise; but on the way he leant
Towards Bion and said softly:
"Art thou glad,
Or dost thou deem the world and I are mad,
And that I sell my youth and bliss too cheap?
What sayst thou, fellow; wilt thou laugh or weep?"

For Bion's cheek was flushed and to his eyes
Somewhat like tears there seemed indeed to rise
And his lip quivered; yet he smiled withal
As now he answered: "Surely may I call
Thy lot the happiest lot e'er told in tale;
And if it might be that I could avail
To share it somewhat, what wouldst thou say then?"

The Captain's face grew grave: "Among all men
I should choose thee belike—yet scarce know why—
Though thou art kind, and thine heart aimeth high,

And thou art fain a life of fame to live—
Come now, if so thou willest, we will strive
To hold together till the end of all;
Belike as into loneliness we fall
Each to the other through dull days shall be
The glimmering light whereby we each may see
The joy and promise of the bygone days
Ere into many dark and doubtful ways
The broad way sundered—what an untold pain
That yet may be before the end we gain!"

They parted mid the press as thus he spake
But into bloom in Bion's heart did break
A great delight; full of things sweet to win
The world seemed; good it was to dwell therein,
And yet a fair thing 'twixt glad day and day
To risk the sweeping of all this away
To win a little more.
Now so it fell
That with the Arcadians went things more than well,
And back again they went in two days' space,
But Bion had good leave in that same place
Yet to abide: full word the envoys gave
That in a week an army would they have
Afoot and hot for fight: but ere that tide
Fluttered with fear the land was far and wide,
For Sparta was afield again: wild tales
Of horror came from all the nighest vales
Unto Laconia, of man, wife and child
Slain with sharp torments; holy maids defiled
Before the altar; steads with salt strewn o'er,
All hate and fury loose: and more and more
Each hour did folk upon the Captain gaze
As though it lay in him to give good days.
So at the last, he, thinking of the thing,
'Gan deem it best the dice once more to fling
In desperate wise, nor wait the coming there

Of the Arcadian folk, lest swift despair
Should quench the unreasoning joy his folk erst had.
So he rode forth, and who but he was glad
That day at least, as out of gates he went;
Firm looked his band, bright-faced and confident,
Until all folk, the foe being unseen yet,
They and their close array, 'gan to forget
That this was but a handful; for be sure
The Captain had but those who might endure
Hard brunt and long, nor cared to eke
His line out with poor-hearted folk and weak,
Or half-armed lads; so sullen silence broke
And the gates shut upon a shouting folk,
And most thus left behind were of good cheer
But those belike whose loves or children were
Marching on proud enough, nor thinking much
Whose hearts but theirs the coming fight might touch.
But Bion who beside the Captain rode
Looked grave and pale, as one who knew what load
Upon the smiling Captain's heart might lie,
For he, though he should hold it good to die
In such fair fellowship, yet in good sooth
Deemed life a lovely thing amidst of youth,
And with a sickening of the soul still thought
Of the world going on while he was nought,
And heeding little of his life or death.

The Story of Aristomenes

Not far from Stenyclerus, the tale saith,
On certain Spartan plunderers did they come
And slaying many drave the others home
Unto their camp: then, it being end of day,
Upon a little knoll-side they made stay,
And till the dying moon the daylight brought,
A rampart of felled trees about them wrought
And waited there with good heart, till they heard
An hour ere sunrise how the Spartans stirred;
Merry were all, but Bion, who as yet

No point of mortal steel had ever met,
Felt as in some wild dream; all flushed he was
And 'thwart his spirit changing clouds did pass
And minutes seemed grown hours; and all the while
He watched the Captain pass with quiet smile
About the ranks, even as one who felt
But little hope or fear, but deftly dealt
With a great engine, understood indeed,
Yet but half trusted, asking for all heed:
His mien to most men there gave heart enow,
Strange fear to Bion—all things seemed to grow
So changed and hard to cope with. But the sun
O'ertopped the hills and suddenly outshone
O'er a grey world, and down below, where lay
The tents of Sparta midst the olives grey,
On a great shifting coil of steel 'gan flame,
As from the camp the dreadful spear-wood came,
Silent of words, but in the morning still
Sending dull tramp and clash from hill to hill.
A pain grew Bion's breath, and hard to draw,
Colours of things kept changing, like a straw
His great spear felt within the hand of him.
But as he looked about, with eyes now dim,
Now passing clear of sight, he saw his friend
Rub from his sword-blade with his gown-skirt's end
A speck of rust, e'en as a dreadful shout
Rang from the hill side; then he turned about,
And from his lips a word came, sharp and clear
But nowise loud; and from the hope and fear
Of many hearts a cry came, bowstrings' twang
And dull sounds answering and the changing clang
Of armour smitten followed, and a sound
As though of thunder prisoned underground,
A wild cry and a flash, and face to face
Amid the tangled spears for a short space
Stood Bion with the wild-eyed men of war,
With life and death no more to him a care

And no more feeling hopeless or alone,
Or wondering aught at aught that might be done,
For fallen dead the Spartan fury was
Before the hopeless wall they might not pass,
Whence man on man fell back, as the line swayed
This way and that, as little knots there made
Wild rushes and gave back again. At last,
Drawn back a little way beyond spear-cast
To arrow-shot they turned them, till a man
Armed gloriously from out their midmost ran
And cast away his shield; then at his cry
Down went the spears of all that company,
And dying men beneath the wall turned round
With hopeless eyes as the feet shook the ground.
But ere their spears could surge against the wall,
The Captain from the top thereof did call
In a great voice: "O fellows, come ye forth
Lest they should think our spear-staves of less worth
Than these green boughs! too far apart are we—
Too far apart those cruel eyes to see!"

Clashing he leapt adown amid their shout,
Up went the spears, and soon were most without
The piled-up trees, and running 'gainst the foe
Foremost of whom the gold-clad man did go,
Big made and open-mouthed and fiery-eyed
Who, setting eyes upon the Captain cried,
"I see the man!" nor spake another word,
For swift ran Bion forth, and ere the sword,
Whirled wild about, smote Aristomenes
Fallen beneath an axe cast to his knees,
The Arcadian's blade let out the Spartan soul
Through his pierced brawny throat; down did he roll
And over him clashed spear and axe and shield
As the ranks met together; swayed and reeled
Amid wild clamour there the Spartan folk,
Then gave back slowly, and then turned and broke

Adown the hill, and with all death behind,
All shame before them, scattered, 'wildered, blind,
Fled toward their camp; and little did it lack,
The story tells, but none of them went back
Unto the camp or Sparta; but it fell
That the high Gods, who love great men too well
To let them work their work out over soon,
Cast o'er the world two hours before the noon
Thick mist and clouds low-drifting; so the rout
Of beaten men escaped through dark and doubt;
And when the next day dawned serene and clear
The Spartan leaguer was no longer there.

Now when the man Bion had beat down there
Was borne forth in his golden armour fair,
Known was he for a man of royal kin,
And for his slaying did the young man win
Thanks in few words from Aristomenes,
And from all men such praise as well did please
His eager heart, and still for more he yearned,
And down the dusk of coming life there burned
Bright shows of life and death made sweet by fame.

And now to make Messenia's joy complete
The Arcadian help the Captain's band did meet,
And a great host they were, who wended now
Their might unto the countryside to show
That lay anigh Laconia; there they found
Great signs of ravage everywhere around,
And many a tale of Spartan wrath they heard.
So in the Spartan marches flock and herd
And plenteous wealth they swept up, nor might hear
Of men-at-arms to meet them anywhere
Nigher than Sparta: but the Gods once more
Would not that all too quickly should be o'er;
For when the host was ready to set on
For very Sparta that all men deemed won,

The Arcadian prophets put forth omens dire
Nor would their folk move forth a furlong nigher
Despite the Captain's prayers, toward the foe.
Then first 'gan Aristomenes to know
How one man fights against the world and dies
Winning great fame and many miseries.
Yet did the host with plenteous joy wend back
And in the Captain was there little lack
Of smiles for all, and sweet words: why should he,
He thought, foretell the coming misery
To such as these?—a many would die first,
Though he should live to see his life accurst.
So at Ithome was there joyful day
At their returning.
Now would Bion stay
Beside the Captain, and things turned out so
That he had leave his will herein to do,
And thereat glad his friend was for his part;
The young man's eagerness rejoiced his heart
Old ere its time, in sombre manhood steeped,
Its freshness with so many cares o'erheaped,
Where day by day some bliss long cherished died,
Some hope that once seemed fashioned long to bide.

The Story of Aristomenes

TRUCE WITH SPARTA: THE YEARS GET OVER

FAIR bloomed meanwhile Messenia's hap brought back,
No fortune now the freed land seemed to lack
For a long space; with the Arcadian aid
And a great host of men right well arrayed
Fared Aristomenes to meet again
The gathered might of these most stubborn men,
Whose good heart at the last did fail them now
When ugly omens did their prophets show
Upon the eve of battle; wherefore they

Made truce until three years should pass away,
And so to rest may all Messenia turn,
And it may be, before long come to learn
How wealth dulls courage.
But this time of peace
Brought little rest to Aristomenes
Who now must turn his eager heart to deal
With daily troubles of the commonweal;
Wherein, God wot, his heart would sicken oft,
So hard it seemed to bear the head aloft
Mid dull recurring waves of faithlessness,
And cruel folly; young he was no less,
Strong-hearted, and as day passed over day
No added weight he on his soul did lay
That he might 'scape; so he lived on his life
With calm heart waiting for the coming strife
Nor ill content that not too swift it came.

There Bion dwelt too greedy after fame,
Splendid of speech, devouring eagerly
Life as it passed lest too young he should die,
Hot-hearted, longing sorely for all praise,
And amorous as the first of April days,
Beloved in turn amid his youth's fresh flower
By many a maid from sweet hour unto hour;
Deeming his friend scarce worser than a God.

And so the days each on the other trod
And months rolled into years: not overwell
The truce was kept, and at the last men fell
To open war ere the three years were o'er,
As though full fain to make peace never more.
Fierce fights there were, and it fell oft enow
That neither side much glory had to show;
Defeats borne up against; sad victories
Where dead men lay as thick as autumn flies
For little gain; treachery, faint-heartedness

When courage most was needed. And no less
Than in the first flushed days of glorious strife
Was Aristomenes with all hope rife
In outward seeming; and in sooth, the land,
However buffetted on either hand,
Had still a name and place.
More years passed on
And from all people now had Bion won
The good name that he yearned for; brave and kind
He was, and in his presence would men find
Help against hard things; women loved him well.
Of all his happy days 'twere hard to tell
And how sweet life still seemed to him: most men
Would turn a little grave and silent, when
The eyes or speech of Aristomenes
Came 'thwart their life; but unto all of these
Did Bion seem most meet for every need.
Folk feared the Captain now; deemed him indeed
Wise, just, but hard; yea ready it might be
As the years changed, for needful cruelty—
Dark-souled they deemed him: but the other one
Across the dull path of the world had shone
A very light from heaven, so brave and true,
So soft e'en when the worst of folk he knew.
So of all men was Bion well beloved
And many hearts of women had he moved
E'en as I said; yet was it even so
That Aristomenes still failed to know,
Amid his wisdom, one thing strange to tell,
That scarcely ever when his feared glance fell
Upon fair women, did it fail to move
Their inmost hearts with thoughts of a sweet love
That brought no shame with it—and it was true
That children well the heart within him knew
Nor feared him, though no smile should light his face.
Thrice it befell that in some open place
Mid a wild storm he was; then to the knees

Of this so-dreaded Aristomenes,
Trusting, unchid, the homely children crept
And unscared watched the lightning as it leapt
From heaven to earth, thinking that surely there
No need there was the Godmade threat to fear.

Men deemed it fair that Bion clung so close
To Aristomenes, who yet might lose
The people's love, they said, ere all was told;
So did keen eyes and clear the end behold!

THE DREAM OF GLAUCE

SAY that five years are worn by since the day
When Aristomenes first reft away
Peace from Laconia; at the very stead
Where those first wild defiant words were said
My tale deals now; there dwelt the widow still
Of the slain man: her barns the year did fill
With plenteous increase now, and rich she was.
For ever had it chanced all war to pass
This side or that of her fair fruitful lands,
Nor had she had a trouble on her hands
Since that ill day long bygone. Still waxed there
That daughter, now a woman wondrous fair,
Great-hearted by folks' deeming, and most wise,
And yet a trouble to men's hearts and eyes.

So on this summer morn behold her go
About a garden-alley to and fro;
Fresher than are the daisies swept aside
By the fair wrought hem that her feet doth hide
Has she been wont to walk there; but today,
Yea for a many days, her eyen grey
Show heavy thoughts, and her fair brow is drawn
With memories of the slow-foot leaden dawn

When weary with wild longings of the night,
Empty of thought, she chid the lingering light.
She stayeth now, and with a languid hand
Plucks at the raspberry bramble, and doth stand
Gazing with listless eyes upon the wealth
Of the full garden, till at last by stealth
Come through unnoted sound and scent and sight
Dear memories of her childhood's fresh delight,
Which little by little draw her on to see
That summer morn, when, somewhat wearied, she
From out the murmuring scented place had turned
Into the court wherein the hot sun burned,
And so with slow feet reached the peopled hall,
Amid its coolness into dreams to fall,
That were dreams still, when those Messenian folk
With woe and wrong across her young life broke.

So now she stood awhile, and scarce, I deem,
Could have told out what things were in her dream
If one had asked her; yet therein indeed
Were images of war, and days of need,
Sick-hearted striving, utter loneliness,
That may not ask for any heart to bless
Its gain and loss; all this borne in such wise,
For such a glorious end, that men's cleared eyes—
When the worn heart rests, lonely still at last—
Behold a dead God from amidst them past,
And make long tales of it. Her dream saw then
Another life apart from striving men,
Listless and self-despising and alone
Till death should find it out with nothing done,—
—What if a third dream swept in with the breeze
That bore the scent of blossomed linden-trees
And fruits full ripe unto her weary face?
Sometimes within her heart with these had place
A dream of eager life and happy rest,
Lonely no more, still striving for the best.

—Whate'er she dreamed, like dreams of sleep it was,
Unmastered by her, as her feet 'gan pass
Once more between the lilies.
So she came
Unto a yew-set place, and her own name
Seemed in the throbbing air, as dreamily
She sat her down beneath the darkest tree
And heavy with unrest sank back at last
Against the trunk and into real sleep passed.
And still in sleep her name she seemed to hear
Each time called louder, yet she might not stir,
Till like a shriek throughout the place it rang—
"Glauce, O Glauce!" and she heard a clang
As of an armed man fallen, and upright
She stood awake again, the sudden light
Making the sweet place dreadful; but withal
She heard one close anigh her name outcall,
And turning, pale and trembling, still she saw
Her fostermother through the dark boughs draw;
A woman old and wise, and somewhat feared,
Because men deemed that from the Fates she heard
More than the most of folk: with anxious eyes
She gazed at Glauce, till there 'gan to rise
A great dread in her heart, and she cried out:
"O mother, hast thou given me then this doubt
Of what today shall bring?"
She set her hand
Upon her breast, and panting there did stand
Till the old woman came to her, and laid
A kind hand on her slender hand and said:

"Fear not, my child, sure nought goes wrong with thee,
Though thou and I belike somewhat may see
This morn of what is coming."
She sat down
As one o'er-weary on the bench of stone
Beneath the tree, but the maid stood a space

Gazing upon her with an anxious face,
Then sank adown upon the grass beside,
And, while her lashes her deep eyes did hide,
Spake out:
"Thou knowest, mother, time agone
While I was yet a child, thou deem'dst me one
Who knew of unseen things; myself I knew
As one who cast all heart and hope unto
Great things and far off: but time passed and I
Waxed and at last was somewhat womanly,
Then gloomy dreaming left me clean, and thou,
As well beseemed, thereat wert glad enow;
For I grew lithe therewith and strong and fair,
Glad with my life alone and the world's air
And common sights and sounds—wise as a man,
Thou calledst me once, and a pain through me ran
As thou saidst that—yet surely with good days
My life went by along those pleasant ways,
Too happy to need hope or passion aught.
But now a long while something has been brought
Anigh my eyes that I may see not clear,
Yet know that change and trouble doth it bear
For me and for my life."
Her hand fell down
From off her gown's hem to the grass, as she
Spake these words; but the old dame curiously
Gazed on her, yet said nought; until she saw
A rising pain her fair lips downward draw
And down her cheeks slow tears began to fall;
Yet she spake on:
"Nor, mother, is that all;
Behold me; has not my bright face grown wan
These days past—those wise words as of a man,
Hast thou heard aught of them for long? scarce now
I heed in what wise the fair flowers may blow
In this desired summer-tide; my eyes
See and see not: scarce have I will to rise

In the sweet morn, although I loathe my bed;
Night comes and I am weary, yet my head
May have no rest upon the pillow there;
And yet I dream, and wild eyes seem to stare
On my unhappy face, that once would smile
So frankly upon all things; and meanwhile
Nought know I why these things should fall on me
For I ail nought; in fair estate are we,
And all the trouble of this dragging war
Is but a murmur to us heard afar."

She stopped, and her head fell, her eyes did meet
In empty wise the gems upon her feet
And her fair-broidered hem. But the nurse spake:

"Some little while, belike, thou didst not wake
Last night, O dear one; for I mind me well
That years agone when weighty dreaming fell
On me, thy night was dreamful too, and now
A dream I hold of import could I show."

Glauce turned not to her, but wearily
Made answer: "Yea I dreamed last night; for I
Thought I abode with hunters in the wood,
And wove a wreath of flowers as red as blood,
The while they told of all their cares and foils,
And how the King-beast had escaped their toils.
Nor did I think that ill; but midst of this
Things changed without surprise, as still it is
The wont of dreams; amid grey wolves I sat
Who snarled and whined in hungry wise; with that
From out the dusk came other dog-wolves ten,
Marshalled indeed after the guise of men,
About a mighty lion, who methought
Nobler than all beasts; but his claws were gone
And his jaws bound: well, so my dream went on
That well I knew these wolves had done the thing,

And long they snarled about the yellow king
Rejoicing, till at last they lay down there
And fell asleep. Then was I full of care
For that great beast, and rose and went about
To rend his bonds; and then without a doubt
Of aught of folly, as in dreams it goes,
I gave him other claws in place of those
That they had had from him; and glad at heart,
Roaring like thunder, then did he depart
Into the waste, and I—I cowered down
Among the brake, for grass-green was my gown,
And from the wakening wolves I strove to hide;
But now my gown at first full long and wide
Grew short and strait, and therewith did I seem
To see my bare limbs in the moonlight gleam,
And knew the grey beasts, white-toothed, red of tongue,
Beheld them too—but through the air there rung
Great sound of trumpets as my terror grew
Unto its height, nor more of dream I knew,
But in the moonlight lay awake and cold."

"E'en such a dream I looked thou wouldst have told,"
The crone said; "but upon a hill of grass
Amid my dream last night methought I was
And saw an eagle struggling in a gin,
And would have told thee, but might nowise win
Away from where I stood, till presently
Lo, even thy very self came hurrying by
And freed the noble bird, then didst thou reach
Thy white wrist out, and seemed fain to beseech
That he would perch there, neither did he fail
To do thy will, then did thine arm avail
To bear him up, and thou didst turn to me,
And I came to thee, and we went all three
Through pleasant meads until I woke to day."

Sidelong upon the grass fair Glauce lay
As the nurse spake, nor seemed to heed at all;

Nay, mid her own tale the words seemed to fall
From out her lips, as though she scarce knew aught
Of what she said: clear now the soft wind brought
The throstle's song from the deep wood-side near,
And mingled sweet scent with that sound did bear;
Short grew the shadows, and the conduit's noise
Was a fair sound to make parched lips rejoice,
For not a cloud there was in all the sky.
Silent were both there, until suddenly
Unto her feet leapt Glauce, and the sun
White with the noon adown her side did run
As she cried out:
"Is there no more than this
In such a life as folk call full of bliss?
The daily rising to soft words of slaves,
The flute a-babbling while the bath's cool waves
Lap one about; the scented essences,
The lordly loitering 'neath the blossomed trees,
Hearkening the hum of working maids anigh;
The word scarce uttered that one's will may fly
To folk that fear us; then the harp-soothed meal,
The talk of little things while sleep doth steal
Over the weary soul; the lingering sun
So weary-hot e'en with day well nigh done,
And then the night, with change and hope shut out,
And within, yearning vain and ravelled doubt—
—And all this o'er and o'er and o'er again!
Ah is there one who has not deemed it vain,
A life like this? who has not cried to live
Some fairer life, with hope and fear to strive,
That dying they might leave a little done,
Nor while they lived be utterly alone?"

The nurse smiled on her, and said: "Fair my child,
E'en such a life as folk hath oft beguiled
To thinking hopeful yet may come to thee:
When thou wert little often might I see

Glimpses of this thy coming life; but now
Misty do all foreshadowings to me grow,
Because perchance the things that they foretell
Are nigh at hand now."
E'en therewith there fell
Upon their ears the sound of a great horn,
And either started with new thoughts halfborn
From anxious hearts, and the nurse said:
"Woe's me
Shall our stead at the last war's ruin see?
This was a blast of war that we have heard."

But some fresh hope within the maid's heart stirred.
"Come," said she, "and fear not, nought will it save
Of harm, if here the meeting we shall have."

And catching up her skirts she hurried on
Into the paved court flooded with the sun,
Where 'bove a crowd of men new come afield,
Raised high on a great spear shone forth a shield,
Wherein on golden ground wrought cunningly
With outstretched wings an eagle seemed to fly,
And well the nurse deemed that that shield of yore
Had hung in their own shrine the God before;
But midst the knot of home-folk they could see
Were men-at-arms, and one spoke eagerly,
As one who tells a fair tale: "Well," he said,
As they drew nigh, "not ill the trap was laid,
This man—behold him, a mere man he is!—
Works hard, God wot, to win his people bliss,
And mad things must he do to make them think
That he no more than Hercules would shrink
From dealing with a host—that he is God—
Whereby it came that in the springe he trod:
He fell upon the chapmen, as I say,
And with his spoil he followed up the way
To where the pass makes dusk at the noontide,

And there we bode him by the highway side.
No need to make long tale, for there were we
With bows and spears, sixscore in company,
And when the whistle let the shafts fly forth
And they were sped, but ten of his were worth
Touching with edge or point, and he fled not,
And sooth to say was nowise over hot
In handy blows, so here without a wound
We have him, a fair sight thus safe and sound
For the old town—ah your dame is here,
Stand by, my masters, leave a good space clear."

Indeed the goodwife came from out the hall
Fair clad, and back fell serving-man and thrall,
And midst the men those twain could now behold
A goodly one in armour dight with gold
But swordless and fast bound, who in calm wise
Now turned his sunburned face and light grey eyes
Toward Glauce, and a faint smile crossed his face
As though her fairness pleased him; 'neath his gaze
She changed and trembled sore, and the hot blood
Seemed stayed about her heart, as there she stood
Twitching her hands as though to reach to him,
And feeling faint and weak of heart and limb,
Yet ever counting o'er and o'er again
Those men-at-arms and muttering, "Ten, yea ten."

But now whereas the goodwife was come forth
The spokesman said: "A thing once deemed of worth
We bring you, lady, though perchance tomorn
It shall but be a thing of all to scorn,
And the next day an ass-load of worm's meat,
Though once indeed it went on eager feet
And had the name of Aristomenes."

"Welcome," she said, "in what thing may I please
Thee and thy fellows? all is not enow
Some honour to this happy hour to show."

"Lady," he said, "here would we lie tonight;
Our company shall come back with the light
Tomorrow morn, and with them shall they have
Enow to meet whoso shall try to save
This treasure here, when they shall hear of it,
How it is vanished."
A light smile did flit
Across the Captain's face; but the dame cried:

"Be welcome here as long as ye will bide,
And sooth I hope to make you say henceforth
That this is a fair stead of plenteous worth.
Ah I am glad today—for thou, for thou
Didst speak thy name here once—cried far enow
Since that tide now some five years past away.
How sayst thou, art thou glad yet of that day?
Speak, is thy tongue bound too?"
A murmur ran
With chuckling laughter on from man to man;
But Glauce flushed blood-red and new strength came
Into her heart as he spake out:
"Nay, dame,
Gladness and sorrow for a long time past
Are grown mere words to me; if life shall last
Beyond tomorrow I shall hope again,
As I hope now, yet not for loss of pain,
Nay I scarce know for what. But now behold
If any tale of this thine house is told
This shall it be, that Aristomenes
Guested here twice."
"Nay, bondsman, hold thy peace!"
The goodwife cried, "a long tale dost thou make,
Thou needst not weep belike for thy life's sake,
I deem not they will slay thee; rather thou
In some barred cage shall be full-fed enow,
And children shall be brought to see thee eat
And laugh because thou thinkst a beast's life sweet."

But Aristomenes laughed out and said:
"Well, when the turf upon my breast is laid
I shall lie still perchance, nor heed mocks aught;
But more fools are the Spartans than I thought
Unless they lay me in that strait abode."

Then from the homefolk one unto him strode
And smote him with a rake-staff from behind
And the rest laughed and jeered; but deaf and blind
Grew Glauce now, and well nigh had cried out,
But the nurse whispered low: "Have thou no doubt
That the Gods need us; strive then with thine heart
Till the time come for us to play our part!"

But now the goodwife led into the hall
And there was good cheer dealt out unto all,
And men were merry, mocking at their prize,
Who sat amid their jeers with unchanged eyes
And ate the meat they brought him, though indeed
For that they mocked him more, and said, "Small need
For thee to eat, Messenian, unless thou
Deem'st thou hast not yet wasted us enow!
Wilt thou die drunk then?"
Nought at all he said,
Nor changed his colour, nor abased his head
Whatso they spake, but Glauce sat all pale
And quivering, till she, fearing for the tale
Her face might tell, said:
"Mother, dost thou see,
What an ill face I bear about with me?
Scarce now this place, this man's eyes may I bear,
Because methinks I see my father here,
And those eyes glaring on him."
But with that
Must her face turn to where in bonds he sat
With a strange look that did belie her speech;
For pardon rather did that look beseech

As her eyes met his solemn eyes, wherein
Through wonder did a troubled pity win,
As of a seer who seeth the end so well
Yet nought to any man thereof may tell.
Sick yearning took her soul amid that gaze,
She strove her hand to failing eyes to raise
And might not, but sank backward fainting there,
Whom to her bower the maids did straightly bear
While spake her mother:
"Ah poor maid, she grows
Changed now, ailing and dreamy, but who knows
But a man's love might somewhat change her dream.
Love-sick without a lover doth she seem."

But Aristomenes, as one whom death
Made clear of vision, muttered 'neath his breath:
"Woe's me, that yet my dying face should make
The heart of such a lovely thing to ache—
My face, that living had no power to move
The heart of any woman unto love!
Ah, if my soul shrinks from the coming end
God wot that from great troubles do I wend
Wherewith I thought full surely once to strive.
Yet were I fain a little while to live—
Well, a few hours proves all for good or ill."

"What, bondsman, wilt thou mutter at us still?"
A homeman cried, "hast thou some magic then
To cast o'er us, the best of the world's men,
And so o'ercome us vilely? Deemest thou
Perchance that thou wilt 'scape us even now?"

Then with a smile said Aristomenes:
"Fair fellow, nay, I dreamed I was at peace,
For that a God had taken me by the hand
E'en at the entrance of a flowery land,
Fairer than my Messenia."

His calm voice
Thrilled through the hearts of men mid all the noise,
And something like a dread across them crept,
As though they doubted that some vengeance slept
Anigh them, and no man spake to him more,
But from the hall to a strong room they bore
Their Terror soon, and there they guarded him
Nor durst do off the bonds on hand and limb.

Day waned and died, and with the first night-fall
Again 'gan men make merry in the hall
And drank deep, but five men-at-arms bode still
With Aristomenes and ate their fill,
And drank, but sparingly. Now ye shall wot
That the nurse that night had got
Charge o'er the drink; according to their need
Unto the maids she dealt out; and indeed
There ever would the drink be clear and good,
And strong enow, and midst their joyous mood,
Small marvel if they deemed it best that e'er
Their lips had touched, and the feast wondrous fair.

So into deep night did the first dark pass,
And dreadful all that noise of feasting was
To Glauce, as she lay awake and clad
Within her bower, and in her mind still had,
Through yearning and confused grief, a doubt
Of something great at hand, that should lead out
Her feet from that dull maze of fear and woe.

But where the Captain bounden lay alow
More muffled came the noise, that still he heard
Betwixt harsh laughter and loud scornful word
His guards raised, as he watched them at some game,
Till over him a gentle slumber came
Bearing soft dreams, that vague and meaningless
Did yet with some familiar happiness
Float round his rest.

In such wise the night grew,
But as close unto midnight now it drew,
The noise of feasting somewhat suddenly
Seemed to fade out, till on the house did lie
Dead silence; then fair Glauce, sunk ere now
Into a half dream, broad awake did grow
With heart that beat quick and a sudden fear
At that deep stillness, midst which did she hear
Footsteps a-drawing nigh; the moon's grey light
Wherein she trembled seemed to grow o'er-bright,
Panting she waited till some fearful scream
Should break the silence: then a sudden stream
Of red light through the half-shut door did fall,
And then it opened—and she knew it all
What was to do, when on the threshold there
The old nurse stood and beckoned; strange and fair
Showed Glauce, bright her face flushed, as she went
Up to her nurse and whispered, "Thine intent
Methinks I know, so no more need for words
Among the edges of the poisoned swords."

The nurse smiled and led straight into the hall,
Through whose high windows did the moonlight fall
Upon the feasters sunken as they sat,
Blind, motionless, and rigid; and thereat
Somewhat did Glauce start, and whispered, "Yea,
Have we then slain them, are they passed away?"

She smiled and said, "Nay, surely they will wake
Some time tomorrow angry for our sake;
They have but had a sleepy draught of me."
And therewithal she led on speedily
Unto the hall's end by the high-seat fair
And held aloft her taper, in whose glare
Did Glauce see the helm and erne-wrought shield
Hung up beside the sword that he did wield—
Old trophies new come back unto that house—

Which things on tiptoe, with her tremulous
White fingers straight she took adown and bore
After the nurse, who hastened toward the door
That led unto the dungeon; weight enow
That gear was of, but if she went o'er-slow
Beneath it, she but stayed to set her lip
Unto the well-worn silver of the grip
Of that good sword.
And so they reached the place
Wherein she knew was hidden the dear face
That had changed all her life. She hung aback
As the door opened now, and seemed to lack
All strength at once; strange noises seemed astir
About the dank walls and the prisoned air;
Strange doubts came o'er her of the days to be,
Of those grey eyes that she so longed to see,
Of the brave life and great and glorious heart
Wherein she longed so sore to have a part.
But the nurse drew her in, and she must gaze
Despite herself upon his solemn face
Calm in the depths of sleep: then down she knelt
And all the joy of utter love she felt
Sweep o'er her heart, as, like a wandering bird
Her mouth stole o'er his face, and her ears heard
His light breath from the lips that sleep did part
A moment, and the beating of her heart
Stopped as her burning lips were pressed to his
And all her soul went from her in a kiss.
Then his eyes opened slowly, and his hands
Moved somewhat underneath the iron bands,
And sweet his smile was, and a bright flush ran
Across his face; but, even as a man
Who wakes up to a well-expected fate,
He started not, but silent there did wait,
While from a guard's belt a small fetter-key
The soft-foot nurse had stolen silently,
Which into Glauce's trembling hand she slid.

Who took it and scarce knowing what she did
Unlocked the bonds on foot and hand: but he
Waited for that last clicking of the key,
Watching her slender hand, then to his feet
He rose up stiffly, and his hand did meet
Her hand outstretched; but as they stood there close
Each to the other, on his prostrate foes
His eyes he cast, a moment did he stand
Unsteadily, while her deserted hand
Fell down, and felt no love left there with it,
And o'er her heart a great pain did there flit.

But he knelt down, and smiled and 'neath his breath
Muttered a word, then drew from each sheath
Each sword of those his guards, and the bare blade
Across the throat of each dull sleeper laid,
Then rose, and saw her standing with the sword
And shield and helm, and took them with no word
But followed as the old nurse led the way.
But when they had passed through the hall where lay
Broad stripes of moonlight yet, and all about
The sleepers wallowed, as a man in doubt
He paused beside the door, as though he thought
No further on his way he should be brought
By those who led him, and he made as though
He would have spoken there, his heart to show.
But the old woman, who had laid adown
Her taper quenched, muttered, "Haste, haste, pass on;
Who knows when vengeance will awake tonight?"
And forth she led out into the grey light
That flooded half the court: you might have deemed
For the great silence 'twas some city dreamed
In olden tales, where fast as sleep the dead
All people sleep; but onward still she led
And after her white gleamed the Captain's helm,
And fluttered Glauce's gown. In some strange realm
She seemed to be where none should know her more;

The kindness of old days a burden sore
Lay on her soul; a many images
Seemed sweeping past her in the fitful breeze;
A many hopes of unregarded years,
And on her feet fast fell adown the tears.
Once or twice he looked back, and then she turned
Her face away; 'twas as the moonlight burned,
Burned as her tears burned.
Groaned the heavy key
In the outer gate now, and the silent three
Drew close by its great leaves; then back they swung;
But still her feet upon the threshold hung
A little while, and dreadful thoughts did rise
Within her heart, as there with close-shut eyes
She dealt with fear, and thrust regret aside,
Until with greater fear her heart nigh died
As presently she found herself alone—
A short space only, for the two were gone
Into the oak-wood; with a smothered cry
She ran to join them, and there presently
They stood together by three horses tied
Unto the trees their coming there to bide.
Then in a low voice did the Captain say:

"This life of mine late ebbing fast away
Ye twain have given me—wherefore I know not—
And if in turn aught is there I have got
To call mine own—as verily my life,
Made by the Gods a weapon for this strife
Is not mine own—if aught ye e'er shall ask
Well may ye deem 'twill be no heavy task
To give it you. One word yet, short as is
Our time together here—What meaneth this,
These horses dight for three—will ye—wilt thou
Flee from this place so rich and happy now?
Maiden, thou know'st me not; shalt thou so fair
Cast all thy soul and love on empty air?

Forgive my rude words, for full sure I see
Some cruel God drives thee to loving me—
Woe's me therefore! Where are the words to tell
How great a burden on my spirit fell
Those first days of the strife! I smile, I talk,
And like a dead man mid the living walk
Because I have this deed that I must do.
Where are the words wherewith to tell to you
How I desire Death, if it might be?
How shall ye then have part or lot in me?
Think of the burden of our miseries
When I shall be all changed unto thine eyes!
And that shall be as surely as I live,
For how should such as I have love to give?"

Now when she understood that well he knew
The heart in her, strong in her love she grew,
Nor did she falter as she said to him:
"Hearken a little, ere my thought wax dim!
Needs must I pray for all that I desire,
Needs must all right and wrong burn in the fire
That burneth me: yet ever do thy will,
So am I better led, nor less thine still!
And yet howso thine heart or mine shall ache,
Whate'er thou givest me, that will I take
Nor count the cost—Wilt thou that I return,
Amid dull life and hopelessness to yearn,
To think thee cruel and bitter cold, to say
'A fool I was to cast my weal away,
I should have won him ere the end was o'er'?
—Behold now, never will I speak word more
Hereof, however close to thee I live."

Something within his heart there seemed to strive,
But while he stood as if he pondered there,
The nurse, who while they spake on both did stare,
Said in great wrath: "Nay for thy manlihood

Needs must thou do whatso she deemeth good,
Since she for thee is made her country's foe;
And know ye not to what fate she shall go
If she go back? Thou who hast dealt with these
Know'st with what tender mercies they shall ease
Their hearts for luckless losing of thine head;
Nay rather draw thy sword and strike us dead
Before thou goest safe home unto thy place!"

But while she spake a bright look crossed his face,
Most kind his eyes grew. "Dame, as young folk will,
We dream," he said, "but there is good time still.
Hasten and mount! and thou O kind and sweet,
Let me but kneel adown to kiss thy feet
That brought me life and healing, and then come
For I would know thy deeming of the home
That waits thee there; where surely shalt thou be
Worshipped by all folk that set eyes on thee."

She trembled, for in very deed he knelt,
And on her throbbing feet his lips she felt,
And stooped to touch him, and no more debate
Her soul held now with coming days and fate.
Then with kind arms he set her on the steed,
And mounted, and the ancient nurse 'gan lead
Through the blind woodways onward to his land,
Until the wood grew thin on either hand.
The noon of moonlight streamed upon his face
Whereon with longing eyes did Glauce gaze
Half happy now—O unforgotten night
Of bitter grief of passion and delight!

THE STORY OF ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

ARGUMENT

ORPHEUS THE THRACIAN SINGER HAVING LOST HIS LOVE BY DEATH, WOULD YET NOT BELIEVE THAT SHE MIGHT NOT BE WON BACK AGAIN, BUT SOUGHT HER WHERE NONE ELSE HAS DARED TO SEEK, & THERE AS IT WERE, COMPELLED THE GODS TO GRANT HIM SOMEWHAT; WHICH NEVERTHELESS HIS OWN FOLLY CAST AWAY AGAIN, AND HE WAS LEFT TO LIVE AND DIE A LONELY MAN.

DOWN in the south Laconian country-side
About mount Tenarus, a wood spreads wide
And toward the heart of it holm-oak and yew
Make it right hard for light to struggle through,
Make twilight in the noonday. Ere ye reach
This darkest place, the crisp leaves of the beech
Make a sweet ceiling overhead; the oak
And many-keyed ash good for shaft and yoke
Grow sparser next above the thin hard grass;
Then through a clear space doth a swift stream pass
A rod from whose bank the black wood uprears
Its mighty mass of dread: in long passed years
So was it at the least, as tells my tale;
And in those days no quarry might avail
To draw the hunter to the further shore
Of that small stream, though, folk said, golden ore
Rolled from the hills thick on its shallows lay
To wait, belike, the coming of the day
When Pan should die and all the Gods should leave
The world all changed, as folk did then believe
Should one day come to pass. All men did dread
That wood exceeding much, and deemed the dead

Walked there at whiles; and that the Gods who least
Love mortal men, whose dreadful altar-feast
Needeth men's blood, at whiles would haunt the place.

Yet one there was in such a fearful case
That hope from fear she never more might tell
Who e'en amidst the very place did dwell
And with the dead held converse; nor might men
Number the years this fearful one bore then;
Or know if she would die, for ever she,
As tells the tale, in all folk's memory
Had been the same to look on: so it was
That sometimes would her awful shadow pass
Long in the sunset, long in the low moon
Over the hay-field, and the maidens' tune
Would quaver and die out, and hand from hand
Would fall away, and youth and damsel stand
Trembling and scarcely daring to draw breath,
As love grew faint before the coming death.
Yet since strange tales went of her wondrous lore,
Sometimes would folk that hard need pressed full sore,
Cry from the stream's bank on her dreadful name,
They durst not name else; and the hag still came
At the seventh call, and, for such homely hire
As woollen cloth, or knife fresh from the fire,
Wheat-meal, or kid fit for the slaughtering,
Fresh oil or honey, or such like other thing,
Would speak in dreadful voice that scarcely seemed
To come from her, and of ill dreams thrice dreamed
Would tell the import; or teach fearful skill,
How to gain love perforce, and how to kill
Far-off unseen—in battle to prevail,
To heal the half-dead and make weak the hale.

That wood and she who dwelt therein did curse
The country-side, I deem: more wild and fierce,
More cruel and hard in love, more fell in hate

Were those than other folk, content to wait
With blind eyes in this changing doubtful home
The bitter and the sweet that were to come.

With none of these our story dealeth now
But with a stranger who went to and fro
Amid the dwellings that stood round about
The wood, and hearkened tales of dark and doubt
Men told thereof, silent himself, distraught
Amid the wondering men with bitter thought
With grief untold to these, which yet our tale
Shall tell of somewhat. In a Thracian vale,
He dwelt erewhile, and Orpheus had to name,
And from a proud and mighty race he came
Of which few words folk tell, but know that he
Could deal with measured words and melody
As no man else, and all the people moved,
And in all matters was right well beloved.
Now this man wooed the maid Eurydice
And won her, and the days wore by till she
Was wedded to him, but or ere the night
When all their longing into pure delight
Should melt away, as her fair feet did pass
Over the sweetest of the garden grass
And he beheld them, unbeheld there crept
A serpent through the flowers o'er which she stepped
And stung her unshod foot in deadly wise
So that before the July moon might rise
To gleam upon the rose-strewn fragrant bed,
She, the desire of all the world, lay dead.

Ye who shall read what after followeth
May deem belike how this man first saw death;
Who none the less at last arose from pain
So great, that from its heart he needs must gain
Some little hope, if he should yet live on,
And so this grew until at last he won

A bitter courage from his lone despair,
That scarcely would believe in death, or bear
The burden of the changeless Gods while love
Was yet alive the very death to move,
What lore he gained, or in what hidden place.
But so it was that still he set his face
Toward Tenarus, until at last outworn
With grief and watching, on a bitter morn
Upon the borders of that stream he stood
With strained eyes fixed upon the fearful wood.

Black was his raiment, and a withered wreath
Of flowers that once had felt the summer's breath
Was round his head; an ivory harp, well strung
With golden strings, about his neck there hung:
Lovely he was, well-wrought of every limb;
But white and wasted was the face of him
Beneath his golden hair, a thing to move
The best of Goddesses to ruth and love,
If she might dream a little while that fate,
Stayed by the hand of love, an hour could wait
To let her taste the fear and hope and pain,
That still we strive to think not wholly vain.

Midwinter was it, dark the full stream ran
Betwixt two shelves of ice; the sun grew wan
Already, as the promise of the day
Was marred by the long cloud-bars dull and grey
That the light frosty wind drew from the north;
From the brown brake-side peered a grey wolf forth
And snarled behind him, e'en while overhead
A raven wheeled, glad that the year was dead
To make him rich. Then Orpheus seemed to wake
As from a dream, and looked around and spake:

"Long hast thou been a-dying, O bitter year,
Whose summer-tide such woe to me did bear!

And dieth not time withal, though still I strive
A little, and a little hope doth live.
But I—I shall not die, I shall not die
E'en when this hope is utterly gone by,
But, living, unconsumed by misery still,
Into a timeless changeless sea of ill,
Made but to waste my wretched soul, shall float,
As from a dark stream's mouth an unmanned boat
Floats into a windless sea fulfilled of death."

He clenched his hands, and drew a weary breath,
And o'er the grass that through the thin dry snow
Struggled aloft, he went with footsteps slow
Until he came to the stream's shallowest place,
Then with his sick hope quivering in his face,
Crashed through the ice and splashed the ripple through
And gained the bank, and toward the dark wood drew,
That none in memory of aught alive
Had dared to seek, with death and hell to strive.
But he for nought that might abide him quailed,
E'en when the winter day's sick sunlight failed
Beneath the black boughs, and the twilight dim
Betwixt the tree-trunks needs must seem to him
Gained not from day, but from some strange place shed
Where day and night need not the changeless dead.
Nought living in that wood his eyes might see,
Scarce might the snow betwixt thick tree and tree
Reach the sparse herbage, or the hard brown ground:
Though the wind rose without now, no real sound
But of his hasty feet therein he heard;
Yet by the silence nowise was he feared,
For, wrapped about in grief and strong intent,
Scarcely he saw the way on which he went
Or took note of the trees, as one by one
From out the gloom his eyes were fixed upon
They grew, then met him, then were left behind.

Thus darkling through the changeless woodways blind
Long time he went, till suddenly a light,
Red, dusky, flickering, through the silent night
Of the moveless boughs sent a long wavering way,
Changing to black and red the tree-trunks grey.
No cry came from his lips, nor did his feet
Falter one whit, but swiftlier moved to meet
The heart of the strange light, until at last
Into a treeless open space he passed,
Though what was overhead he might not say,
Sky or what else; for surely the world's day
Had scarce waned yet, yea and were it night
With neither moon nor star the sky to light
Scarce had this wide-spread twilight glimmered there
To mingle with the red blaze that did flare
From out the windows of a house of stone,
White and unstained as is a wind-bleached bone
In a dry land. He looked down toward his feet
And might not name the flowers that they did meet,
Though blossoms certainly that glare did light
Not the thin grey grass and snow dusty-white
Of the cold world without; whereby he knew
That some strange land he thus had journeyed to,
But felt no fear, nay rather hope, that strange
Should all be round him; and the changeless change
Of seasons, each slaying each, and night and day
Waxing and waning thus were passed away.

So now unto the doorway of that hall
Swiftly he passed, and as his feet did fall
Upon its threshold, wild new hopes there came
Across his heart. He entered; a great flame
Shot up from floor to ceiling of that place
Reddening his raiment and his wild white face
And lighting every nook and cranny there.
A mighty [hall] had he accounted fair
Mid the world's sunlight, with the boughs of trees

Brushing its windows in the fitful breeze;
But here, mid utter silence of all else
Save the flame's roar, mid horror such as dwells
Amidst a city where all folk have died,
Dreadful it seemed, and even he did bide
Doubtful a little while, with eyes all dazed
As through the smokeless swirling flame he gazed;
All was of stone there, flawless-smooth, and white,
Pavement and walls and roof, but for the light
That reddened it: betwixt the fire and door
A laver was there sunken in the floor
Whose moveless water mirrored the straight flame;
A brazen bowl there floated in the same,
And by the pillar that rose up anigh,
A black-fleeced ram lay gasping piteously,
The red blood running from his breast apace.

Now sounded a shrill voice adown the place:
"Draw nigher, Orpheus, tell thy tale to me
Of the glad world unmeet for me and thee
That hast a mind the heavens and earth to move:
Tales wherein hope is told of, and sweet love,
Where each loves each in sweet and equal wise
Beneath the just Gods' happy unseen eyes."

Then such a laughter on his ears did fall
As made him deem that in that dreadful hall
His sin and his despair did him abide,
A thing made manifest, that ere that tide
Dimly he knew, a dream: and yet his feet
Now drew him on the worst of all to meet.
But as betwixt the pillars tall he passed
Lo, nor their whiteness, nor his blackness cast
A shadow on the pavement, in despite
Of that great swirling shaft of ruddy light.
But now all fear that his great heart drew round
At the first hearing of that dreadful sound

Died clean away as onward he did wend
And saw one sitting at the hall's far end
On a great seat of stone, a woman, clad
In white wool raiment: in her hand she had
A rock wherefrom she span a coal-black thread;
Her face was as the face of one long dead
But for her glittering eyes, and white and long
Hung down her hair her raiment's folds among.

"All hail, World's Hope, World's Love!" she cried, "we tw
Of such a meeting long have been most fain:
Yea, though thou knowest me not, yet oft indeed
Thou calledst on me in thy bitter need,
To make thy face as brass, thine heart as stone—
O good it is we twain are met alone!"

Now as he drew close, therewithal it seemed
As though this too with all these things were dreamed,
And had no import: as he stood there, still
One thought, one hope his wasted heart did fill,
That in such wise from out his soul did flame
That o'er his cheeks a ruddy flush there came
Mocked from her corpse-like lips by laughter low
As if his thoughts she nowise failed to know.
Then with a proud and steady gaze he cried:
"Mother, all hail! for though the world be wide,
Thus have we met; I who desire, and thou
Who hidden things and life's end well can show!"

"Mother of nought at all," she cried, "am I;
The love and hope that I saw wane and die,
I brought it not to birth, but in a dream
Was it made mine: the thought that once did seem
Born from my very heart—who knows, who knows,
Whence it was born, amid what fearful throes
Of Gods, to mock me as alone I sit,
Mazed twixt the rising and the end of it.

Fool of the world, thou hearkenest not to me,
Deeming thy love a part of thee to be,
Knowing it mighty, thinking that thou too
Art grown a God all marvellous things to do—
Assay it, O thou singer, who didst move
The little hearts of men ere thou didst love,
And canst not move them more, O hot-heart fool,
Who then as now wert but the helpless tool
Of that undying worldwide melody
Whose sweet sound mocks the vain hearts made to die.
—Thou hearkenest not—how then shall I avail
Thy vain desire? Speak, tell me of thy tale!"

Indeed with wandering eyes he turned to her,
As though no meaning all her words did bear,
But when she made an end of all, he said:
"Mother, folk say thou dealest with the dead,
Thyself alive—as old as thou mayst be,
As wise by lapse of years of misery,
I, young, unwise, methinks might look upon
The eyes of those that their last rest have won
As thou thyself dost, nor more lonely grow
E'en for that sight; because within me now
Instead of lore and wisdom is there set
Desire too strong to dally with regret,
To deal with dreamy bitter-sweet half-rest,
To strive for that which wise men call the best,
Forgetfulness and blotting out of day;
Too strong but as a thinnest mask to bear
Sick-hearted patience through the days to wear.
Nay I need pray thee not, I know thy thought
As thou know'st mine; I am not come for nought,
Alone of all men, to this fearful place."

Silent awhile upon him did she gaze,
Then cried: "Nay nay, thou com'st not here to strive
Save with the Gods who kill and make alive

And know not why—so even let it be,
And as I may will I give help to thee;
I who perchance am even one of these
And shall not die to gain a little ease.
—Yet hearken now, thou as thou standest there,
So loving and so lovesome and so fair,
All music on thy lips, and in thine heart—
More than a God in this one thing thou art,
And if love ruled the world thou too shouldst rule.
But so it is not; love is but the tool
They use to make the morning bright and fair.
Even by the silence of thy dull despair
The brown breast of the thoughtless nightingale
Is filled with longings vague to tell thy tale:
Through the cold patience of thy grief forgot,
A hundred thousand springs wax bright and hot,
A hundred thousand summers bear the rose;
And with the fruitful rest thine heart did lose
A hundred thousand autumns grow o'ersweet
Before the star-crowned winter's cold white feet;
While thou thyself, a waif cast forth, shalt fare
Alone, unloved, thou knowest not why or where.
Come then today and strive and strive and fail,
Beat down and conquered—yet of more avail,
Sweeter and fairer to the world than though
In triumph thou thy short life passedst through,
Glad every day and making others glad."

Methinks he knew not, or for good or bad,
The words she spake to him, but in his eyes
Gleamed a strange light, as he beheld her rise
And step down toward him; as a king's eyes gleam
When from the hall forth unto battle stream
His folk foredoomed behind him, and the shout
Of foes unnumbered ringeth round about.

But now on his hot hand her hand did fall
Ice-cold, and slow she led him down the hall

Until they came unto the laver fair,
And there she bade him bide, and into the air
Departed, but returning presently
Bare store of herbs with her all strange to see,
With some whereof her dreadful hair she crowned,
And some she strewed about upon the ground,
Or cast into the water: then she took
The ram now dead, and from her long arms shook
The cumbering raiment back, and therewith strode
Unto the fire and cast therein her load,
That flesh and fell and bone the fire licked up;
Then from her girdle did she take a cup,
And filled it from that water, and then spake:
"Drink and fear not; thine heart that so doth ache
Shall rest a while. Lie down hereby, and sleep
Over the trouble of thy soul shall creep
Despite thyself. But when thou wak'st, take thou
Thine harp, if aught there be within thee now
Of melody; and in the sweetest wise
Thou mayest, sing thou of thy miseries:
For doubt thou not, that those shall be anear
Who all thy tale shall nowise fail to hear
Howso they mock thee afterward. Farewell,
What end soe'er of this thou hast to tell,
Belike it is that ne'er shall meet again
Thine all-devouring feverish longing vain
And my despair that the Gods needs must call
Patience and silence, the great help of all."

The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice

He drank, and almost ere her speech was o'er
Sank with dim eyes upon the marble floor,
Then twice he feebly raised his eyes to see
If she were gone, and twice sank languidly
Again; and yet again somewhat he strove
To look forth, but now scarcely might he move,
For heavy sleep was on him 'gainst his will,
And a void space; then dreams of the fair hill

That hung in Thrace above his father's house,
Beset with youths and maidens amorous,
That waited there his coming forth to them
With harp and fair song, that the wool robe's hem
Might dance about the maiden's dancing feet,
And her loosed hair smite with its tangles sweet
The youth's flushed trembling face drawn close anigh.
But from the house he deemed there came a cry
"Orpheus is dead, and will not come again."
And therewithal he seemed to strive in vain
To add a cry unto the wailing loud
That burst out straightway from the lovesome crowd;
But as he strove all sight passed clean away,
And no more had he thought of night or day,
Or lapse of time, nay scarce if he did live;
But none the less ever his mouth did strive
With that dumb wail and made no sound at all;
Until at last the pillars of the hall
Midst a dim twilight did he now behold
Grow slowly from the dark void; quenched and cold
The fire was; great drops fell from on high
Into the laver, and a strange wild cry
Rang through the lone place—O Eurydice
My love, my love!—yet he knew not that he
Had ever cried: but as he slowly rose
Unto his feet and drew the raiment close
Unto his shivering body, and his heart
Strove to gain memory, his white lips did part,
And as the dead may call unto the dead
With listless hands down-dropped, and hopeless head,
He cried: "O love, O love Eurydice!"
And through the hall his voice rang mournfully,
And died away, nor other sound was there
Except the drip into the water near,
And his own breathing. So at last he moved
And his foot smote against his harp beloved,
And from its strings there came a jarring sound

Familiar once, but mid the marvels round,
In that last refuge of his hope and woe
A stranger sound than e'er he hearkened to.
Therewith he 'gan remember where he was
And all that hitherto had come to pass,
And of the bidding of the dreadful crone.
Then with the pain of feeling so alone,
None nigh to tell of all his longing sore,
His heart grew soft, and his vexed eyes ran o'er
With bitter unseen tears; and midst of these
Came thronging thick and fast the images
Of bygone days; he stooped adown to take
His harp up, and he felt the strained strings quake,
Trembling himself; then with a doubtful hand
Laid on the harp, a while there did he stand
Nor named his hope; until at last the hall
Heard his deft fingers on the red gold fall
And move in loving wise: though he belike
Scarce knew what music therefrom he did strike,
Scarce knew what words from his parched lips came forth.
For all these things to him were grown nought worth:
Only his love lived, only his longing strove
To think the whole world filled with his sweet love.

Long ago has he gone, nor left behind
One word of his to loose love, or to bind,
Yet tells the tale his thought in words like these,
Faint as they be to match his melodies.

WHILE agone my words had wings
And might tell of noble things,
The wide warring of the kings,
And the going to and fro
Of the wise that the world do know.

Then the sea was in my song,
And the wind blew rough and strong,
And the swift steeds swept along
And the griding of the spears
Reached the hot heart through the ears.

So a slim youth sang I then
Mid the beards of warring men;
Till the great hall rang again,
And the swords were on their knees
As they hearkened words like these.

Or before the maids that led
The white oxen, sleek, full fed,
When the field gave up its dead,
The dead lover of the sun,
Sweet sang I when day was done.

Hearts I gladdened, limbs made light,
When the feet of girls gleamed white
In the odorous torch-lit night,
And belike my heart did flame
Though my cheek told lies of shame.

Or in days not long agone,
Would I sit as if alone
Though around stood many a one,
Each as if alone we were
For of fresh love sang I there.

All such things could I sing now,
And to this dull silence show
How the life of man doth grow;
Of all love and hope and hate
And unseen slow-creeping fate.

But of this how shall I sing?
The sick hope whereto I cling,
The despair that everything
Moaneth with about mine eyes,
This dull cage of miseries?

SLOW died the sweet wail of his voice along
The dusk of the hall; an echo of his song
He deemed came back, he knew not whence or how
But there a long while stood he silent now
Amid the silence, till a sudden thought
An unseen frown unto his white brow brought
And once again he smote his harp and sang
Great words that wildly through the dread hush rang.

O YE, who sit alone And bend above the earth
So great that the world's gain Is but a hollow dearth,
And pain forgot like laughter, And love of fleeting worth,
Did ye teach me how to sing Or where else did I gain
The tears slow-born of bliss, The sweetness drawn from pain?

I stand alone and longing Nor know if aught doth live
Except myself and sorrow Nor know with whom to strive,
Nor know if ye have might To hold back or to give,
Nor know if ye can love, Or what your hate shall be
Or if ye are my foes, Or the love that burns in me.

Can ye hearken as men hearken, Can I move you as erewhile
I moved the happy kings, And the wise men did beguile?
When the lover unbeloved Must sigh with rest and smile
For the sweetness of the song That made not light of woe,
And the youngling stand apart, And learn that life must go.

O ye who ne'er were fettered, By the bonds of time and ill,
Give give, if ye are worthy Or leave me worthier still:
For the measure of my love No gain of love should fill.
If I held the hands I love, If I pressed her who is gone,
Living, breathing, to my breast, Not e'en so were all well won.

O be satisfied with this, That no end my longing knows
If the years might not be counted, For we twain to sit all close
As on earth we sat a little Twixt the lily and the rose,
Sat a little and were gone Ere we mingled in the strife,
Ere we learned how best to love, Ere we knew the ways of life.

Folk pray to us of earth To be loved, and sick at heart
Must turn their eyes away, And from every hope depart:
We are lone who cannot give, And grow hard beneath the smart
But ye have wealth and might, Ye can hearken and can give,
What gain is there in death? O be wise and make alive!

HE ceased and listened, for he deemed a sound
Unnameable stirred the still air around,
But knew not if from his own heart it was;
But into utter silence all did pass,
Whate'er it might be, in a while, and he
Stood in that place a moment silently,
Then passed unto the door, and gazed about
And the same glimmering twilight was without
As in the hall, and silence as of death,
So that the very drawing of his breath,
His feet just scarcely moving 'gainst his will,
Seemed a great sound, portentous, mid the still
Warm moveless air: till now he 'gan to think:
Yea, perchance death it was that I did drink
From the crone's cup, and this is but death's life
Silent and lonely, yet with memory rife,
With all the pain of the old struggle left,

With all the love unsatisfied; hope reft
Away from us alone—Ah is it so
That in such wise with thee the hours do go,
And thou art lone, O love, as I am lone?
Yet if thy love for me is no more gone,
Than is my love, sure we shall meet again
To weep and smile above the tales of pain
That threatened, mocking, it would never cease.
Ah, if a word of mine might give thee peace,
Now or we meet, now while thou wanderest
Amid the languor of this dull unrest!

And once again his hands ran o'er the strings,
And once again with thought of long-past things
His heart swelled into music, and his song
Within that echoless land rang sweet and strong.

OME, a white house there was
Set amid the Thracian grass
And the wood-dove moaned thereover,
And the Thracian loved and lover,
Passing by the garden-close
Speaking words that no one knows,
Stopped awhile to smile and say
"Orpheus shall be wed today—"
"The white feet of Eurydice
Fair as thou art fair to me
Soft beneath the lilies white—"
"Bear her forth to full delight
Till the night and morn shall touch."
"Come then, love, for overmuch
Them and us the Gods do bless
With enduring happiness."
"Yea love, for the grass is green
Still, and thrushes run between

The faint mallows overworn,
And the berries of the thorn
Know no ruddy threat of death!"

So they felt each other's breath
And each other's shoulders warm,
And the weight of hand and arm
As they went amid the grass;
There her naked feet did pass
And her hand touched blossoms fair
By the poison lurking there
In the yellow-throated snake;
But their beauty did not wake
His dull heart and evil eyes
And belike in happy wise
They abide now, and shall come
Yet again unto that home.

Ah, the gate is open wide,
And the wild bees only hide
In the long-cupped blossoms there,
And the garden-god is bare
Of the flowers he used to have,
And no scythe the sward doth shave
And the wilding grasses meet
High above their faltering feet
Where the lilies used to grow
And unnailed the peach hangs now,
No more is the fountain full
And the dial's gold is dull;
And the foot-worn pink-veined stone
Of the porch all green hath grown;
Through the empty chambers cold
Moans the wind as it did hold
Dull winter mid the summer's heart.

Think ye that the twain depart
Glad that they alone are glad?

They who saw the clothes that clad
Her fair body that fair night,
Yellowing as the jasmine white
Yellows as it fades away,
And how withered roses lay
On the pillows of the bed
That ne'er touched her golden head?

They who looked so close they saw
The bed-gear into creases draw;
Drawn that noon so by my mouth
Feverish with half-happy drouth.

And the threshold, saw they not
Where my lips thereon were hot
Ere she came, that she might feel
As her feet thereo'er did steal
Trembling sweet, and know not why,
Fluttering hope so soon to die
In the heart of utter bliss
As the still night saw our kiss?

Think ye that these twain might rest
Till they knew why they, so blessed
Such a sorrow of heart should feel?
Through the summer day they steal,
E'en as folk who dwell alone
In a land whence all are gone
Where their shame hath wrought the thing.
For their hands forget to cling
Each to each, and their sweet eyes
Are distraught with mysteries
Hard to solve and hard to leave.
Till at ending of the eve
Folk they meet at last to tell
How the death of joy befell.

HE ceased now, trembling sore, for certainly
A murmur like a gathering wind went by;
Then as it were a strange laugh musical
But mocking, fearful, on his ears did fall.
"Ye hearken, O ye hearken," cried he then,
"Yet hearkening do ye mock the woes of men?
O speak, speak, yet again O song of mine!
Wilt thou be dumb, now, when this love divine
Meeteth the very Gods, naked, alone,
And unafraid, as though the world were gone
Adown the void?"
Already as he spake
A step across the threshold did he take,
And with his heart a-fire and flaming eyes
He let the fountain of his song arise.

O IF ye laugh, then am I grown,
O Gods, as here I stand alone
The body of a ceaseless moan,
Yet better than ye are, a part
Of the world's woe and the world's heart.

For the world laughed not on the morn
When my full woe from night was born
When first I called on you forlorn:
The world laughed not, although I feared
When first its waking breath I heard.

O me! the morn was bright enow;
A little westering wind did blow
Across the rye-field's outer row,
Across her white breast no more warm,
Across my numbed enfolding arm.

The July morn was bright and clear,
No more the cock's cry did I hear,
Now when the sparrows wakened there,
Now when all things awoke around
Mine arms about her heart enwound.

Then o'er the edge of earth and sky
The sun arose, and silently
Lit up the lily-heads anigh;
The sun stole through the room to light
Her arm hung down, her fingers white.

Higher and higher arose the sun
Until unto our breasts it won
And burned there till the noon was done;
Upon my head the sun was hot
And scorched me sore, but harmed her not.

Then toward the west it 'gan to wend,
No wind was left the rye to bend
Till drew the day unto an end;
No wind until the night grew cold
Above the face my hands did hold.

Yet all that bright day mocked me nought,
Through sunny hours its end was wrought
Yet was it sad enow methought;
Its end was wrought mid calm and peace
Yet mournfully did it decrease.

And if men went upon their ways
E'en as in other summer days,
Surely they toiled with no glad face,
Amid the bright day did they seem
To toil as in a hapless dream.

And so at first I thought indeed
The world was kind to help my need;
No thing therein, from man to weed,
But it was kind my love to lack,
To help my need and wish her back.

But ye help not nor know how I
Would help the whole world's misery
And give it bliss ne'er passing by,
Ne'er passing by, if I might sit
Above the world, and yearn to it.

HE ceased and once more passed the murmur by
And after it a sound as of a sigh
That sounded sweet to him, for in his heart
This seemed at last to have a little part.
Then through the dark he cried:
"May it be then
That if no more I see the sons of men
Yet even so I am not quite alone!"

Then in the air again he heard a moan,
And then a voice cried "Orpheus" thrice aloud
And with that sound such strange wild hopes did crowd
About him, that the very death indeed,
Whate'er that is, had well nigh been his meed,
But when his senses cleared he heard again
A voice that spake:
"O Orpheus, not in vain
Thou sayst that the world mocked thee not: and we
Unnamed, unknown, how then should we mock thee?
But how shall song move that which hath no ears,
Or love the thing that nought of longing bears,
Or grief move that, which never doth behold
The world amid unnumbered griefs grown old

Yet still alive more griefs to bear and more?
But forasmuch as thy grief is as sore
As many are, thy will exceeding strong
Mid earthly wills, some semblance of a wrong
Done to the world thou yet from us mayst win
To satisfy thy lust; some gift wherein
Shall poison seem to lurk: this shalt thou take
And fear not for the end; if for the sake
Of that which thou hast set thine heart upon
E'en such a lonely gift thou deemest well won;
But ere thou standest lone and strong, look forth
And weigh how much thy grain of woe is worth
Amid the measureless dust of woes bygone."

Then ceased the voice, but that strong-hearted one
Put back his hair to gaze, and lo, a light
Spread slowly through the dusk of that half night
Until the flowers showed bright, the last trees stood
Grey 'gainst the blackness of the bounding wood;
And then a low and moaning wind, and then
Came and passed by the forms of sad-faced men
And weary women; nor failed each to turn
Such eyes on him as into his heart did burn
An added grief: nor might he turn away,
Till as the unending flock of rain-clouds grey
O'er the sea streaming did they grow to be,
And each one with its unmatched misery
Unnamed, unhealed: until the dusk again
Dropped slowly down over that world of pain
And left him voiceless, sightless, void of thought.

And so again the voice to him was brought;
"O Orpheus, hast thou seen and measured this,
And wilt thou wail out for a life of bliss
And deem thyself great-hearted? knowest thou
If even those thou criedst at e'en now
Live as live happy men who die?—then pray
And gain the grace that the Gods give today!"

Thought stirred within him, but his mouth was dumb
A long time, for faint sickness still did come
Betwixt him and his prayer, until at last
From out his gasping lips a cry was cast
Forth to the dark:
"O love Eurydice!
Where then amid this mournful crowd is she?
With mine own eyes these gazed into my face
And yet I knew them not."
Then through the place
There came a trembling, and the voice grown great
Filled all the air, and shuddering did he wait
Till he might know its meaning, and it said:
"O Orpheus, this thy love is of the dead
As well thou knowest: none shall tell thee now
Whereas she dwelleth; yet perchance, when thou
Goest to the dead land, this and a many thing
Thine eyes shall see clear—O thou tuneful king
What wilt thou have of us? speak out and pray,
Gaining the grace that the Gods give today!"

But therewithal cried Orpheus eagerly:
"O ye, if men should learn that one might die
And yet return, should not their grief be less
Because of hope? should not their happiness
Falter no more twixt time of longing pain
And time of gaining all that they may gain?"

Soft spake the voice: "And thou, O Orpheus then,
Wilt bear this thing alone of living men,
And as thou hitherto hast helped them well,
Help them in this and leave a tale to tell.
For whereas neither God nor man indeed
Thou fain wouldst be, yet may we grant thy need.
Great art thou, great and strong all things to bear!"

No laughter through the darkness did he hear,
Yet a sick fear possessed him, he 'gan quake

As the reed set amid the stream: then spake
The voice again:
"Nay be thou of good cheer
For hither soon shall come the Messenger
And speak to thee what thou mayst understand,
And give thee tidings from the unknown land.
—O glorious Orpheus, leader of the earth
Into the paths of rest and endless mirth,
Well hast thou done to seek us face to face
And win despite our will a little grace
For the world's weary sorrow: surely thou
Art clean apart from all men born ere now,
And as thou wieldest grief so joy can wield,
And hold thy patience as an untouched shield
Twixt thee and change—All shall be well with thee
If thus thou dost, O forge of melody."

So died the voice, and nothing might he hear
Save his own heart a-beating: but strange fear
Unreasoning, of some huge mocking ill
Hanging about him, half his soul did fill
And struggled with the other half, wherein
Was fluttering joy of what he looked to win
Mixed with confused longing: and so dealt
These things together, that at last he felt
Nought round about him, nor knew where he was,
But over him a heaviness 'gan pass
As if of coming happy death, and slow
He sank adown on the hall's threshold now,
And in dead sleep lay long in that dull land
With fear and wonder close on either hand.

HE woke up with the sound of his own name
Filling the air: a sense of wrong and shame
Wrought in him as his heavy head he raised
And round about him through the half-dusk gazed.

Howe'er it was, beat down he felt, brought low
Who had been proud and great a while ago.
He rose at last, and therewithal he heard
His name given forth, and afterward this word:

"O Orpheus, art thou ready for the sake
Of love this burden on thy soul to take:
Unknowing mid unknowing men to dwell
With one who many a secret thing could tell.
Yet may not? Art thou willing to see eyes
Thou lovest so grow cold amid surprise
Of thee and thy desires, and all the ways
Of mortal men who wear away blind days,
They know not why? Wilt thou be satisfied
To have a living body that shall hide
A shuddering soul, restless, gazing across
The world's shows and its idle gain and loss
Unto the things that shall at least endure—
A soul to whom nought earthly shall be pure
Or strange or great—nay, nay, not e'en thy love,
Thou deemest greater than the Gods above?
Is it enough, the gain we offer thee?
Bethink thee; get thee back, and thou shalt see
Thy world again and nurse thy grief therein,
Thy grief and love; then a short space win
The rest of death, and gifts thou dream'st not of.
Or else bear all, and thou shalt see thy Love
Ere this world's day is ended—Speak and pray,
And take the gift the Gods will give today!"

Then Orpheus cried: "O whosoe'er thou art
That speaketh: surely I can hear a part
Of what thou sayest, telling me that I
Shall surely see mine own love presently,
She and I face to face—e'en she whom men
Once called Eurydice, in old days, when
We found each other—for the rest it seems

The air holds soundless thoughts, that as in dreams
Flicker about my heart, but show nought clear—
The babble of the mind—If thou canst hear,
And understand, hear this: Give thou me back
The only thing my heart shall ever lack,
Or let me be—and let the world grow worse
And men and Gods, that heed me nothing, curse
Each other, and the endless wrack begin,
The endless strife where nought there is to win
But worser swifter ruin—O let me be,
A helpless hapless mass of misery,
But lonely at the least, with no pretence
To bless or curse your vain omnipotence,
To be a part of what your hands have wrought,
Who knoweth how, for nought, for nought, for nought."

There stood he panting: but these words being said,
Long silence was there, till there grew sick dread
Within him, that but mocks the promise was,
And nothing from henceforth would come to pass
Except that lonely death for which he cried.
But midst his fears a light 'gan glimmer wide
Betwixt the trees, and grew, until he saw
A strange and lustrous shape anigh him draw.
Man-like it was, not overgreat to see
More than a man, but wings sprang wondrously
From his two shoulders, bright of changing hue;
Moreover when still nigher him he drew,
And seemed about himself strange light to bear,
In nought might Orpheus see his visage clear;
Now burned his eyes with wild and dreadful light,
Now soft they grew, as though his soul had sight
Of something good past words; an odorous air
Stirred in his long locks, from his pinions fair,
Till his bright cheeks were half veiled; then all stern
His mouth grew as of one who needs must learn
Dread things not dreading them himself, and then

In even speech unlike to speech of men
He spake and said:
"Since thou hast made thy choice,
Here am I sent to bid thee to rejoice
Yet amid trembling, for e'en so it is
That e'en this little shred of earthly bliss
Thou hast so wailed for, O thou lonely one,
Is not yet gained, or the deed fully done
The Gods have mind to do—nay what strange pain
Of hope deferred sickens thine heart again?
Be strong, for thou art not amidst a dream
And I am he for whom on earth ye deem
The name of Hermes meet. And now behold,
Thou sayest that thy love would wax not cold
How many years soever thou might'st live,
Thou deem'st thyself full strong enow to strive
With all the Gods, to live and long alone.
And it may be that thou art such an one
E'en as thou deemest—then in very deed
Well shall thy strength now help thee at thy need.
Behold, somewhat the glimmering light doth grow,
A sign of help to thee, of help enow
If thou fail'st not. Toward the world set thy face
Nought doubting of the way, and when the place
Thou gainest, whence thou enteredst first this wood,
Then look beside thee—and how fair and good
The snow-drift and the winter then shall seem
Unto thine eyes! how like a wretched dream
The overburdened summer of thy woe!
For she thine outstretched hand shall surely know,
But yet forgetting all the hollow past
Shall wonder at thine eyes so overcast
With wonder, and the pining of thy cheek,
Thy trembling lips, and why thou dost not speak,
And why thou shudderest there upon the brink
Of the dark stream and e'en somewhat must shrink
Away from her—yea and belike the tears

Shall dim her eyes, drawn forth by tender fears
Of anger risen within thee, or some change
To make the dead forgotten days all strange.
But then withal the pain of her and thee,
The pity for each other's agony
Shall make love greater—deem'st thou not that earth
Shall tremble somewhat through its changing girth
When round about her heart thine arms are cast
And lips to lips your bodies meet at last—
O happy, happy shall ye be that tide!"

Panting stood Orpheus, with eyes staring wide
As from the God's lips forth the fair speech flowed,
Gentle, heart-piercing; and his whole soul glowed
With warmth of happy love: yea was it not
That all that sweetness from his own heart, hot
With hope returning, meeting love had come?
Yet when he strove to speak his lips were dumb,
Nay scarce he knew if yet his aching eyes
Beheld the God or in what wondrous wise
Things were changed round him. Then the voice again,
And o'er his heart there swept a wave of pain,
Bitter and cold as, smooth word knit to word,
Rose up a threat, an overhanging sword:
He saw himself entangled in time's net,
Of love forgotten, helpless to forget,
Yet longing and its sweetness all gone by,
And no one left to note his misery—
Ah me, a space of time ere he should touch
The lips that once with longing overmuch
Had changed his life! before the words were said
Face to face stood he with this newborn dread,
And moaned for pity, as confused and dim
Slowly their import floated on to him
As from a waste land:
"Happy shalt thou be,
O Orpheus, if the love that is in thee

Deal not with time or change or doubt, but still
Thou lookest onward through all pain and ill
Unto the goal, believing that thy love
Can never die howso the world may move:
But ah, how hapless, if thou shouldst forget
That thou upon the steps of death art set,
If thou shouldst deem this minute all in all
And let such dreadful longing on thee fall
That thou must needs turn round about to gaze
On the changed body and the sightless face
That ne'er can mate thee, living as thou art!
Then certainly a fearful wall shall part
Thy soul and her soul; then thy love is weighed
And found a light thing."
Slowly Orpheus said:
"O hollow sound of empty words again!
What thing of earth and heaven can know my pain,
If ye, O Gods, shall doubt my love?—nay this
Rather I say: ye grudge to see love's bliss
Here, where things die not: only on the earth
Beset by cold death's ever narrowing girth
Ye let us love—Come, love, I know no more
How much of that sweet space is now passed o'er
Wherein we have to love—come, unseen sweet,
Be not too far behind my hurrying feet!
Come, the Gods slew thee, I redeemed thee, dear!
Come from the dreadful silence hard to bear
Unto the place where each to each we twain
May weep the loss of all we hoped to gain!"

And therewithal he hastened to be gone
And saw no more by him the Shining One,
Nay methinks scarce now had a thought of him,
As o'er the open space into the dim
Close wood he hurried: on he went until
The sweetness of his love his heart 'gan fill
With many a thought, until his harp, his friend

He 'gan to handle, and therefrom did send
A low sweet sound, and his soul's longing fell
Into sweet words whereof e'en these may tell.

WINTER in the world it is
Round about the unhoped kiss
Whose shadow I have long moaned o'er;
Round about the longing sore
That the touch of thee shall turn
Into joy too deep to burn.
Round thine eyes and round thy mouth
Passeth no murmur of the south,
When my lips a little while
Leave thy quivering tender smile,
As we twain, hand touching hand,
Once again together stand.
Sweet is that as all is sweet;
For the cold drift shalt thou meet,
Kind and cold-cheeked and mine own,
Wrapt about with deep-furred gown
In the wide-wheeled chariot:
Then the north shall spare us not;
The wide-reaching waste of snow
Wilder, lonelier shall grow
As the short-lived sun falls down.

But the warders of the town
When they flash the torches out
O'er the snow amid their doubt,
And their eyes at last behold
Thy red-litten hair of gold,
Shall they open, or in fear
Cry, "Alas, what cometh here?
Whence hath come this Heavenly One
To tell of all the world undone?"

They shall open, and we shall see
The long street litten scantily
With the stream of light before
The guest-hall's just opened door,
And our horses' bells shall cease
As we gain the place of peace:
Thou shalt tremble as at last
The worn threshold is o'erpast
And the firelight blindeth thee:
Trembling shalt thou cling to me
As the sleepy merchants stare
At thy cold hands slim and fair,
Thy soft eyes and happy lips
Worth ten times their richest ships.

O my love, how over-sweet
That first kissing of thy feet,
When the fire is sunk alow,
And the hall made empty now
Groweth solemn dim and vast!
O my love, the night shall last
Longer than men tell thereof
Laden with our lonely love!

SOMEWHAT he lingered now, his hand he laid
Upon his forehead, even as if he weighed
Strange thoughts within him; then he hurried on
Once more, as eager all should be well won,
Nor spake aught a long while; and then once more
A wave of sweet fresh longing swept all o'er
His troubled heart: slower a while he went
And from his parched mouth song again he sent.

SHALL we wake one morn of spring,
Glad at heart of everything,
Yet pensive with the thought of eve?
Then the white house shall we leave,
And go walk about the meads
Till our very joyance needs
Rest at last; and we shall come
To that Sun-god's lonely home,
Lonely till the feast-time is,
When with prayer and praise of bliss,
Thither comes the country side.
There awhile shall we abide,
Sitting low down in the porch
By that image with the torch:
Thy one white hand laid upon
The black pillar that was won
From the far-off Indian mine;
And my face nigh toucheth thine,
But not touching; and thy gown
Fair with spring-flowers cast adown
From thy bosom and thy brow.
There the south-west wind shall blow
Through thine hair to reach my cheek,
As thou sittest, nor mayst speak,
Nor mayst move the hand I kiss
For the very depth of bliss;
Nay, nor turn thine eyes to me.

Then desire of the great sea
Nigh enow, but all unheard,
In the hearts of us is stirred,
And we rise, we twain at last,
And the daffodils downcast
Feel thy feet and we are gone
From the lonely Sun-Crowned one.
Then the meads fade at our back,

And the spring day 'gins to lack
That fresh hope that once it had;
But we twain grow yet more glad,
And apart no more may go
When the grassy slope and low
Dieth in the shingly sand:
Then we wander hand in hand
By the edges of the sea,
And I weary more for thee
Than if far apart we were,
With a space of desert drear
'Twixt thy lips and mine, O love!
—Ah, my joy, my joy thereof!

NOW as he sang he 'gan to wend more slow
Yea well nigh stopped, and seemed to hearken now
For footsteps following—no sound might he hear
But his own heart a-beating, and great fear
Stung sudden to the quick, and forth he sprang
And from his random-smitten harp there rang
A loud discordant noise: swift he passed on
A long while silent, till upon him won
A dreadful helpless sense of loneliness
That with all fear his spirit did oppress;
And at the last he cried: "Eurydice
O hearken if thou art anigh to me!
Hearken lest I faint and fear thou too
Shouldst faint and fear, and all be left to do
Once more—O hearken sweet—this is a dream
And all our sorrow now doth only seem
And thou art mine and I am thine: we lie,
We twain, at home so soft and quietly
In the moon-litten bed amid the sound
Of leaves light-rustling, and my arms are wound
About thy body, but thy hands fall down

Away from me, O sweet, mine own, mine own!
Doubtful e'en now with thy last waking shame."

Therewith from lips and harp the sweet song came.

O MY love, how could it be
But summer must be brought to me
Brought to the world by thy full love?
Long within thee did it move,
Move and bud and change and grow,
Till it wraps me wholly now,
And I turn from thee a while
Its o'er-sweetness to beguile
With a little thought of rest.

Ah me, have I gained the best,
Have I no more to desire
No more hope to vex and tire
No more fear to sicken me,
Nought but the full gift of thee,
All my soul to satisfy.

Ah sweet, lest my longing die
E'en a moment, rise and come,
For the roses of our home,
For the rose and lily here
Are too sweet for us to bear.
Let us wander through the wood
Till a little rest seem good
To our weary limbs, till we,
As the eve dies silently,
Neath the chestnut boughs are laid
Faint with love but not downweighed
By the summer's restlessness,
Wearied but most fain to bless
Pity-laden summer, sad
With the hope the spring once had.

HE broke his song off therewithal; but vain
His hurrying feet seemed the sweet end to gain
Howso he hastened: in his ears there grew
Noises of things that for nought real he knew:
Noises of lands lonely of men, but full
Of uncouth things; the heavy sound and dull
Of earth cast unto earth, the swallowing sea
Changing to roaring fire presently;
Whining of strange beasts, driving of the rain
Against the lone hall's rattling window-pane;
Low moaning of the wind that was not there,
Swift wings of pigeons that the heavy air
Might never nourish: things known that did change
E'en in their midst to things unknown and strange,
Till his brain 'gan to reel, and soon he thought,
How if to dreamlike hearing there were brought
The sight of dreams? And even therewithal
It seemed to him a crowd his name did call
In moaning unison, that to shriek
Was growing, when the darkness seemed to break,
And once more through the shadowless strange day
Came thronging forth that crowd of sorrows grey,
Silent, slow-moving, staring all at him;
Thereat with sickened heart, and tottering limb,
He stayed and hid his eyes a while to cry:
"O if they mocked me not, and thou art nigh,
Help with thy love, thy patience, O my sweet,
To take these unseen fetters from my feet
And pierce this wall of dreams, that I may move.
O help me yet, dear spirit of my love,
Help me, Eurydice!"
Sweet was the name
Upon his lips, and over him there came
A feeling as of rest: the tumult sank,
And when, with eyes from that wild dream that shrank,
He gazed again, empty the dim dusk was,
And onward once again he 'gan to pass.

Yet in a while, when nothing changed he saw
The wood, then terror 'gan again to draw
About him; he felt caged, prisoned there,
And scarce his love and longing now seemed fair,
And time was dead, and he left all alone
Wandering through space where nothing might be won
By will or strength or courage: yet withal
The old wont of song upon his heart did fall
And with the last shred left of hope did blend,
As wearily and slowly he did wend
On through the eyeless dusk, and once again
The harp-strings wailed in answer to his pain.

O LOVE, how the dying year
Love amid its death doth bear—
Death, for though the younglings play
On the green patch by the way,
Though the blue-clad maidens sing
O'er the end of vintaging;
Though to them no pain is love
But a dear joy that shall move
Heaven and earth to do their will;
Yet hangs death above us still,
And no hope of further gain,
But foreboding of a pain
But the dread of surefoot fate
Makes thine eyes so passionate
Makes thy hands so fain to cling.

Hearken, sweet love, how they sing,
And their song is prayer and praise
To the givers of good days,
Though we twain sit all alone
Thinking how that all things won
Are as nought and nought and nought

To the joy our fresh love bought
When all fear of change was dead.

O my love, turn not thine head,
For they laugh amid their song,
And they deem themselves so strong,
That if ever they shall cry
From the midst of misery
There is that shall help their need.

O my love, look not, nor heed
For they deem themselves divine,
And shall curse those eyes of thine
Where death gathers now, and grows
Thy passion to its fainting close.

On me, look awhile on me!
And if nought thine eyes can see,
And if nought thy breast can feel
For the sickness that doth steal
O'er desire that was thine heart,
Yet not all alone thou art,
For my lips and hands are nigh,
And I fail and faint and die
As thou diest, O my sweet.
Our souls meet and our loves meet,
And at last we know for sure
What shall change and what endure.

O my love look down and see
What they deem felicity!
Look down on the autumn earth
And their terror-girded mirth;
Speak with words that have no name
All thy love and pity and shame!

WITH a wild cry he dropped his harp adown
Scarce knowing what a change in him was grown,
He smote his hands together, and ran on
As though he deemed at last the end nigh won,
For far away betwixt the trees 'gan gleam
A feeble light, that verily did seem
To be the day:
"O me, Eurydice,
Be swift," he cried, "to follow after me,
For in the world, if nowhere else, love lives,
And with the very best of all he gives
Shall we be glad, if for a little space.
O the fair earth, my sweet, the joyous place,
Filled with the pleasure of thy loveliness
New-born at last my weary eyes to bless!"

No answer to his breathless cry there came
Whatso he hoped; again he cried her name,
And the light broadened, as his swift feet drew
On toward it, until breathless, dazed, he knew
The goal anigh, but on he staggered still:
The trees grew thinner, the world's light did fill
His eyes, his heart: yet e'en with all so won
The last sick fear and horror fell upon
His quivering soul—Was all a dream, drawn forth
From his great grief that the Gods held no worth
More than another's?
Sick and faint he stood
Now on the very border of the wood,
And strove to think and strove to heed and see.
Without the winter wind sang mournfully
About the lonely place, and the light snow
Was driven round about and to and fro,
Veiling the sky and earth: he gasped for breath
For all seemed failing:
"O thou bitter Death,"
He cried, "and shall I die, and shall she live,

Is [this] then all the gift that thou wilt give,
Her life for my life?"
Still he faced the world
And heard no sound but of the wind that hurled
The white snow up and on; till suddenly
Rigid and stark he grew, and shrieked:
"A lie,
A lie! she never followed me, but dwells
Down in the dark depths whereof no tongue tells."

Then with a dreadful face slowly he turned
Unto the wood, and through the dark there burned
A sudden white light, pure, that blinded not,
And for an instant all was well forgot
But very love; for through the midst of it
His mortal eyes beheld her body flit,
Yea coming toward him: her remembered eyes
Gazing upon him in no other wise
Than when upon the earth in some fair wood
Their feet drew each to each and all was good.

So was it for a space no man may name
Or measure; then a dreadful darkness came
O'er all things, such a sickening void as though
His feet alone must wander to and fro
About a wide waste world made all in vain,
The very body of the deathless pain
Immeasurable, that was himself, his soul.
He moved and knew it not; the wind did roll
The snowflakes greater grown still o'er and o'er,
And in the close-set beech-trees did it roar,
As on the white world went the dusk adown
Mid cold and clamour: but o'er him was thrown
The dreadful silence of the Gods, as he
Went through the unheeding world most listlessly,
With heart too dead to think of life or death,
Which was the best, or why he yet drew breath.

WHAT fell to him after that last sad sight
How shall I say? it may be that cold night
More than most nights of winter was fulfilled
With mournful aimless dreams; that the morn, stilled
By iron frost, white world and sky of grey,
Had more of blank despair than e'en such day
Will often have—that on his weary bed
The hopeless lover lifted up his head
To hearken, and a strange wild thrill did cross
His dreary oft-told tale of endless loss
And waning hope, as the wind rushing by
Seemed in the breast of it to bear a cry
That well nigh shaped itself into a name,
A name unknown: until there grew a shame
Of his own lonely grief within his heart
And to that cry he cried to have a part
In some more god-like sorrow than the days
Shed dully on his petty tangled ways—
I know not, I—but know as the years grew
Some rumour of the tale twixt false and true
Did reach men's hearts, whereof it came that some
Told of sad shapes haunting that Thracian home,
Sad voices in the chestnut-woods about.
And some that when the night held most of doubt
And terror round the black Laconian wood,
When heaviest the dark o'er it did brood,
When wildest roared the wind about its trees,
When most the moonlight made ill images
Of the o'erhanging boughs about its brink
And to its narrowest the vexed stream did shrink—
That at such tides, amid the wind heard shrill,
Cleaving the dark like threat of god-sent ill,
Low in the hush of the dread summer night
The name of that dead love, that lost delight
Would come upon the world—Eurydice,
What hideth so thy hands thine eyes from me.

But the world wore through years of good and bad,
And tales that less of pity in them had,
Or more of hope, of Orpheus men 'gan tell:
Such as how death at last to him befell
Long after this: for he was slain, they said,
By the God-maddened bands that Bacchus led
Adown the banks of Hebrus: other some
Say that the tuneful muses took him home,
That on the cloud-hid steep of Helicon
From out the world's grief a calm life he won,
Nothing forgotten of his feverish pain,
Nothing regretted, but all spent and vain,
And he not glad nor grieved, but God indeed.

Ah let such go their ways, his earthly need
Ye know; his earthly longing and defeat.
Thank him low-voiced that even this is sweet
Unto our dying hearts that needs must gain
A little hope from pity and from pain.

THE WOOING OF SWANHILD

ARGUMENT

OF OLD TIME A CERTAIN KING, WELL STRICKEN IN YEARS, SENT HIS YOUNG SON TO WOO FOR HIM AN EXCEEDING FAIR MAIDEN, BUT, WHEREAS EVIL TONGUES WERE BUSY ABOUT THESE THREE, THE END OF IT WAS THAT THE YOUNG FOLK BEWRAYED THE OLD KING, AND, BEWRAYED IN THEIR TURN, DIED A TERRIBLE DEATH.

A KING of the Goths there was as tells my tale
Men called Hermanaric, a man of might
Whose fortune midst all trouble did prevail;
High soared his joyful spirit many a night
Of battle won beneath his banner bright;
Bowed knees he knew, and trembling outstretched hands,
And shouts of welcome to new-conquered lands.

But now at last he sat him down in peace
Fain to forget that there was more to win,
Doubtful in dealing with his late-gained ease,
Mid the wide borders of his land, wherein
Whate'er there was of woe or fear or sin
But reached him when his great men bade him choose
If they should slay or save or bind or loose.

Now mid his highest lords a man there was
Of forty summers, fair of speech and mien,
Well-liking, deft to bring all things to pass
That by the King's eyes they might so be seen
As though Hermanaric the Goth had been
The King of Paradise, and no more wrong
Than God, to give account to weak or strong.

Black-haired this lord was, thin-lipped, stern of brow,
As one fulfilled of justice; so when he

Gave mercy unto one beat down enow,
Strange sweetness seemed in that benignity
Wherewith his freed heart bade the wretch go free.
Folk trembled at his name, prayed for him, deemed
His death a hope that scarcely might be dreamed.

But whatsoe'er he was to other folk,
This lord called Bikki, to the King he grew
His right hand, yea his will, who, ere he spoke
The very thought his heart was big with knew;
Bold to do things the King had scarce dared do,
Yet would have done—no flatterer of the King,
Outspoken, fearing neither man nor thing.

The King had seen him kind, and knew his word
A thing ne'er broken: when the last great strife
Was quenched in one huge battle Bikki's sword,
When every minute with all loss was rife,
Had been unto the King the hope of life,
And his calm heart had made full victory
Bloom from the barren sword-encompassed tree.

So by the King's hands well-nigh Bikki ruled,
Yet in such wise that not to any there
It showed as though the King was much befooled,
And he, nigh sixty winters old, must bear,
As he was well content, both foul and fair,
Curses and blessings, seeming still to be
The God that gave both bliss and misery.

Yet one there was that had no wish to praise
The state of Bikki, e'en the King's one son,
A fair man in the spring-time of his days,
Who for his youth's sake few great deeds had done
And therewithal was strangely looked upon,
Unloved, unfeared, unknown by most of folk
Not kindly, men said, haughty when he spoke.

Unknown as he might be, yet was it so
That Bikki knew him, and he none the less,
As one unwitting, Bikki's heart did know
Which thing with all despair would him oppress
At whiles, and whiles would prick him to redress
The wrong that God upon the world had cast
And raise the burden from men's hearts at last.

For praise and love he longed for overmuch;
No sluggard was he, yet with such a soul
As pleasure somewhat overquick did touch,
As over-soon felt pain's cloud o'er it roll;
And much he lacked clear sight of any goal,
And lacked withal the power of lasting hate
Of being to any as relentless fate.

Note of these men too, that though Randver felt
The bright day darken when his foe drew nigh,
And though in Bikki's cruel heart there dwelt
Most strong intent to sweep his enemy
From out his path, yet scarce to any eye
Seemed Bikki to the prince but frank and kind,
Though somewhat sullen Randver did they find.

Now in these days it fell out that the King
Would hold a great feast: thereat Bikki was
And Randver the King's son, and everything
In the most mirthful wise was brought to pass,
Till gleamed the summer moonlight through the glass,
Then mid a pleasant lull of the feast's noise
Unto the King cried Bikki in high voice:

"In merry days, O King, we dwell with thee
E'en as this day, and wide around thy land
Is richly dowered with all felicity,
And all thy foes lie quiet neath thy hand,
And all men praise thee, praying that still may stand

Thy wise dominion; yet no God thou art;
Despite thy wealth one day must thou depart.

"And though we doubt not that, if this thy son
Shall live to reign when thou art fallen asleep,
Then neath the guiding hand of such an one
Our honour and our good-hap we shall keep,
Yet is he one alone—not over-deep
The sword need pierce, o'er-deep the arrow fly
For all thy race to perish utterly."

The King signed with his hand, as down the hall
A murmur rose, and smiled, and spake in turn:
"Meseems, O Bikki, that my thoughts do fall
From out thy lips; either the wine doth burn
Within me past its wont now, or I yearn
At waking-tides to see upon my bed
Hope of more sons, some fair Queen's goodlihead.

"Speak out, O friend, what more thou hast to say,
For pleasant seems thy face, and well I know
Thou art not one to cast thy words away,
And as thou hast beheld my longing grow,
So unto me art thou good friend enow
A fair fulfilment thereunto to seek;
Speak out the name thy heart hath bade thee speak."

"O King," said Bikki, "scarce without the sound
Of harp and fiddle should I speak the name
Thou bidst me name—but bid the girls fill round
At least, and drink one cup unto the fame
Of one who feared not iron nor the flame,
Nor words of men, nor love to madness grown—
Sigurd, the best man that the world has known!"

Up stood the King, and through the hall there rang
A mighty shout; for fresh in each man's mind

That memory was; so mid the beakers' clang
Folk drank thereto, and brave and true and kind
Men 'gan to feel: but as one deaf and blind
Sat Randver, with his hand about his cup,
While to the roof men's boastful glee rolled up.

Then turned Hermanaric unto him and said:
"Grudgest thou then the fame of such an one,
Or me the late-come bliss of being well-wed
Unto his kin?—for as my friend's words run
That is the deed meseems that must be done—
Rise up for shame, man, lest I deem thee yet
No son that ever erst I did beget!"

Then Randver rose and said with troubled face,
In low voice: "Sigurd, wheresoe'er thou art
I drink to thee!—who in such happy case
Abode that thou wert loved, nor diedst apart
From her who was the nighest to thine heart—
So fell the shadows from thee—would that I
None otherwise than thus might live and die!"

Sourly his father looked on him, then turned
To Bikki, and said: "Yet methought, men tell
Of Sigurd that his young child slain was burned
Beside him on the fire, when that befell
Which long had been foretold for him; for well
The Niblungs willed none should be left behind
To grow up keeping their ill deed in mind."

"Yea," Bikki said, "so was it that there died
A man-child with him, but when Gudrun lay
Over her husband dead, within her side
There lay a child unborn—fair was the day
That saw her first, eighteen years past away—
A fair day in despite the tears and woe,
The tangled misery that she woke unto."

Again the King spake: "Dreadful tales we heard
Of Gudrun wed to Atli, and how he
Entrapped the guileful Niblungs unafeared,
And how they died: and how at last that she
Slew both her children in her misery,
And of his own hall filled with swirling fire
Made for King Atli royal funeral pyre."

"Yea," Bikki said, "such tale may one deem true,
Yet know for sure that on the yellow sand
She stood, not able any more to wail,
And foiled in gaining death, her cold white hand
And wet arm round her babe, in the fair land
Of Jonakur: because, folk say, the sea
Would nowise end her life and misery.

"There the King wedded her, and there e'en now
She dwelleth: and the sea-drenched white-lipped child
Of that sad morn, fairer each day did grow
Till over her the Queen who ne'er had smiled
For many a year, is grown all kind and mild
Since of her babe Swanhild the Gods had care;
And in that court sweet pass the days and fair."

Then the King smiled and said: "Hearkenest thou, son,
To what our counsellor saith, and deemest thou
That it were good we wedded such an one,
Daughter of Sigurd, were she fair enow
To look down from the throne, when, helm on brow,
And spear in hand the Goths go forth to war,
Wondering how fair the maids of Heaven are?"

As Randver reddened, struggling with some word,
And the King's wrath seemed rising once again,
Bikki broke in: "Nay fear ye nought, fair lord,
That she of Sigurd should be come in vain!
She is so fair, folk say, that men are fain

She should not die or change—it shameth me
Somewhat to speak of such-like things to thee:

"For thou art old, I battered with much war,
And worn with thought of counselling thee at need,
Judging of men, all things that weary are,
And through all toil perchance nowhither lead:
And yet, Lord Randver, unto thee indeed
Meet might it be to hearken what folk say,
Poets and wandering folk, of this fair may!"

A troubled frown gathered on Randver's brow
At Bikki's words, but nought he answered him,
Who spake: "Time was I had been fain enow
To hear of poets' guess of hidden limb
And swaying of the silk-clad body slim,
And what they say of hands like lily-flowers
Dealing a-morning with the golden showers

"Of hair that God shall never make again;
Their tale of lips too fair to love, of eyes
So bright that to behold them is a pain,
Of what it is to see the fall and rise
Of her fair fragrant bosom; what surprise
Of joy shall greet the happy man she loves,
When through the clouds the moon of midnight moves."

Randver sat moody-silent, and no less
The King withal, who smiling stroked his beard
Till at the last he woke from thoughtfulness,
And cried: "Well now that I thy tale have heard,
It seems a fair tale: neither are we feared
Of this King's saying nay to our desire
Since for the maiden scarce may he look higher.

"But let tomorn bring counsel, and more words
Concerning this last stem of a great race.

Drink to our fortune, son!—and ye, fair lords,
In all the earth let there be one glad place
Whatso of trouble the world without may chase
Through these fair hours of night that heed us not—
Drink and be glad for all that we have got!"

So wore the feast through to an end: but when
The next morn came then withal Randver knew
That the King sat among his wisest men
In council: but the prince went not thereto
Nor was he summoned, for the days were few
Whereon the King would call him to the board
O'er which the great men dealt the treasured word.

But when noon came the King for Randver sent
Who found him lonely; and all eagerly
He 'gan to tell him of his full intent
How Swanhild in his kingly bed should lie:
"Lo son," he said, "swift draweth eld anigh,
And I would live my life nor waste the days
Yet left me ere I travel on dark ways:

"Therefore tomorrow a fair company
Shall take ship here, and in a noble keel
Make for King Jonak's land across the sea
Bearing great gifts, as coming not to steal
The maid, but in a royal fashion deal
With her and hers; and now my will it is
That thou and Bikki speed my hope in this."

Now Randver reddened as the King made end,
And answered slowly: "Meet it is that I,
O father, on thine errands still should wend,
And bear aloft thy might and majesty;
Yet mindst thou not how in the haven lie
Things wherein thou too once wouldst have delight,
Fair long-ships with no maidens' pillows dight?

"Mindest thou not how word thou gavest me
That in what embers of the old strife burn,
Quickening our life yet, I myself should be
The captain and the leader? Sore I yearn
Among hard things a goodly name to earn;
For mid thy peaceful glory here I dwell
Mocked of myself by unrest none can tell.

"Mocked of myself—and, to speak out my heart,
Scarce looked upon by thee or any one
In such a wise, as well befits the part
That I should play on earth: with little done
Amid folk wont to see great marvels won—
Let me go, father, for the world is wide;
As lief would I be from my death to hide

"In homespun cloak as in a cloak of gold!"
His voice rose as he spake, and at the last
Nought wavering did there seem in him or cold:
But o'er the King's wide face a shadow passed
Of puzzled wrath; that no less faded fast
Before his son's eyes; and he smiled and said:
"Nowise the good-heart of our kin is dead;

"And well meseems is that—I have enow
To bring my bride home: in the days bygone
I should make such words just e'en as thou
Nor borne, when aught of fame was to be won,
To go my father's errands—I have done
As an old man in asking thee for this:
Go, son, and grudge me not a little bliss—

"A little bliss such as my life knew not
The sooth to say ere I began to think
That after all my fame might be forgot
Or I at best into dull death must sink—
All blessings on thee! Would I had to drink

The cup the Fates have filled for thee anew!
Go forth O son, be happy, strong and true."

Then Randver spake in a low voice and grave,
"All hail my father, and tomorrow morn
Two fleets shall stem together the green wave
At the haven's mouth, and unto days unborn
Shall each go its own way and ere the corn
The plain is green with now is garnered in
I hope a little change of life to win.

"Farewell in love, O father, if again
I see thy face it may be I shall speak
Words that my lips this day should speak in vain:
O farewell! think if I have been too weak
Through all the coils that mar our life to break,
Yet have I been too strong that with blind eyes
I should help weave our web of miseries."

Then spake the King: "I know not of this word
What thou wouldst mean by it; once more I say
Good hap go with thy counsel and thy sword—
And yet again, meeter for thee to stay
Until thou mightest go upon thy way
After high feast and good gifts as is meet
For a son of the Goths and lord of a fair fleet."

"Nay," Randver said, "thou wottest well that we
Have waited but a week for wind and now
The wind is fair—hold thou no feast for me,
Pinch not thy treasury to help my show—
Keep all thy gifts until my fame shall grow,
For now a banner and a name is all
I need wherewith to conquer or to fall."

They kissed and parted; Randver to the quays
And tumult of the shipmen passed; the King

Sat silent thinking over long-past days
And gazing at the ghost of many a thing
That once was full of life—till hurrying
O'er his departure thither Bikki came
And thoughtfully the King called out his name,

And when he drew [nigh] said: "Did Randver pass
From out the palace?" "Yea," he said, "and I
Rejoiced to see him blithesome as he was
As in the porch he passed me hurriedly;
Most well content he seemeth certainly
To go a-wooing for thee, yet belike
Fair blows one day his gilded sword shall strike."

"Nay, Bikki," said the King, "and is it so?
Thou growest envious—I have done him wrong:
High words he spake e'en now and needs must go
His own ways and not mine. His heart is strong
To win all glory mighty men among
And I am glad of him and so being glad
Must lose the sight of him that once I had

"Whenas I deemed him but of little worth."
Then Bikki smiled. "Nay, me thou wrongest withal
Who ever deemed that all the fame of earth
Into the lap of thee and thine would fall
And therefore have so served thee: this I call
A happy day whereon he doth begin
E'en greater fame than thou belike to win.

"Moreover in despite thy word, not ill
I deem it that this marvel of thy wife
(For surely few days shall that wish fulfill)
Should meet him not first mid an idle life,
Idle yet with desire of high things rife—
Thou deemedst him of little worth saidst thou?
Ever I deemed him wise and great enow:

"Knewest thou ever dastard's or fool's heart
Go with such eyes as in the head of him
Are set: or hast thou seen a coward's part
Played by a man so wrought in every limb?
Trust me those eyes shall yet make fair eyes dim.
But all is well now—brave and amorous
Wise, fain of fame, well shall he prop thine house."

Well pleased the King smiled e'en as Bikki went
From out the chamber—who at eve that day
Came upon Randver on the quays, intent
On furnishing his fleet in the best way
That might be, and light of heart and gay
He seemed indeed, as one at last set free
From tangling trouble and uncertainty.

A cloud came o'er his face as Bikki drew
Anigh him, and his cheek grew somewhat red
As though he wotted that the other knew
His inmost thought; but Bikki spake and said:
"Fair sight to me to see the goodlihead
Of this thy fleet! Thou lookest a great chief;
I look to hear of deeds past man's belief."

By a great open arm-chest Randver stood
And his right hand amid the mail-rings played,
A vague blind hate curdled his eager blood
As he looked up to Bikki now and said
With a half smile: "If all be rightly weighed
This journey shall in after days become
More famed than mine—this bringing the may home."

"Yea," Bikki said, "yet as thou art my friend
More than my King's son, so much will I say,
That would the thing were well brought to an end,
And I as heart-whole as I am today!
I have heard tell of men who cast all life away

For such a hope as when I lie asleep
Betwixt my troth and vague desire will creep."

Randver stared wild at him. "Thou meanest then
That thou amid thy five and forty years
Shouldst turn stark traitor, be a tale to men!
Bethink thee, Bikki, that thy King's son wears
A sword, and of the axe the headsman bears—
Or art thou grown so great that thou art king,
Lord of my father, me and everything?"

Bikki smiled calmly: "When the deed is done
Then slay me: but behold I told this tale to thee
Because in good sooth still I deemed thee one
Too wise to long too much for sovereignty,
And therefore, thought I, goeth he over sea
Because he deems holding a war-ship's helm
An easier thing than ruling a great realm.

"But if thou art less wise than I had thought
And thinkest to come back unto this land
To rule it when thy sire is come to naught,
Then wiser had it been to glove thine hand
And in the court of Jonakur to stand
Wooing fair Swanhild for thy father's bed.
Come, art thou wroth when all my word is said?"

There Randver stood a short while silently
The swift thoughts busy in his inmost mind:
Somewhat too glad to see the back of me
My father seemed—Bikki is left behind,
Hermanaric's heart grows day by day more blind—
Yea and mayhappen I may yet prevail
And death is left me even though I fail.

Then Bikki spake: "The thing that erst I said
Whenas I deemed that thou wert prince no more,

No more thy father's heir, I scarce should dread
If thou went'st with me—and behold full sore
I cling to life nor would that all were o'er
For a youth's longing—neither durst I say
Unto the King what thee I tell today."

Then Randver laughed aloud. "I deemed thee wise—
Nor know what madman's dream this is that thou
Shouldst tell me of a love for unseen eyes
Grown in an hour within thine heart; ere now
I deemed no wind maids' love to thee might blow."
Then Bikki said: "Belike a dream it was
That brought this strange desire of mine to pass.

"Medreamed that on my bed last night I lay
And heard a moaning slowly drawing near,
And through the open door there came a may
Bewailing her, more fair than aught is fair
Who seemed unto my inmost heart more dear
Than mine own life. She held out hands to me
And showed her slim wrists shackled cruelly

"And moaned, 'O Bikki thine hand forged me these
And who shall free me?' On mine heart withal
Came thronging thick a crowd of memories
Of fair deeds undone, proffered love let fall
All barren to the earth—and musical
Mine own rough voice seemed grown now as I said:
'In all wise would I help thy drearihead—

"'For thou art Swanhild.' Then she smiled on me
In piteous wise, and with bare hands I wrought,
As dreams will have it, till I set her free;
And then she kissed me and it passes thought
To tell how sweet that was till day made nought
Of all my gladness. Nay but well thou sayst
I am a fool to strive such bliss to taste."

Then Randver thought, Lies is it, nought but lies
Belike—and yet men tell strange tales of love,
And this man, forger of all miseries,
Who knows but somewhat might his hard heart move?
And lies or truth nowise doth it behove
A man to flee from fate and they meseems
Would have me to the end dream out these dreams.

Then he spake out: "What counsel givest thou
For me to follow? for thou knowest I deem
That the King gave right joyous leave e'en now
For my departing; neither will a dream
Hold back the word of dastard if I seem
To choose for my ease' sake to go with thee."
"Nay," Bikki said, "easy the thing shall be:

"Take thou tonight thy due seat at the board
And in meanwhile shall I have seen the King,
So say thou nought till he takes up the word,
Then answer at thy best e'en to such thing
As he shall say. Yea thou art wise to cling
To what the Fates have given into thy life—
Hard to build up great state from daily life."

He went therewith, and Randver left alone
Felt listless, restless, full of a vague fear;
A petty thing the world to him was grown,
And yet he felt as great days drew anear—
Great days great joy and woe with them to bear—
And yet withal foiled, beaten did he feel
And fresh defeat upon him seemed to steal.

Most glorious was the feast that night in hall
When all the glories of his days bygone
Hermanaric seemed about him to recall;
Yea with the spirit of old battles won
Men's hearts seemed raised aloft, old banners shone

From wall and pillar and old war-cries rang
Amid the melodies the minstrels sang.

There sat Hermanaric, ruddy, wide of face,
His yellow white-streaked hair and beard spread wide
Over his gold gown; keen adown the place
Gazed his grey eyes, unruffled fearless pride
All wrath and selfwill in his face did hide;
Great was the hand that had so oft prevailed
In dreadful fight, long fingered, almond-nailed.

Uneasily did Randver gaze at him
As toward his place he went, and in his heart
The morn's clear vision now had grown all dim,
And in a net he seemed to play his part
In a strange land where by some devilish art
All that he had of good seemed turned to ill,
A petty peevish deedless dreamer still.

Dream-like the feast went on—as in a dream
At last he heard the King say: "O fair son,
True is it that this morning we did deem
That whereas thou wert fain to get thee gone
From our foes' hands to win what might be won,
Thy wish was worthy of our name, yet now
Again a choice we give thee. So choose thou:

"Choose when thou once again hast heard me say
That gain we deem [it] that thy lips should speak
The words our heart has for the matchless may
Our counsellor tells of. Sure not far to seek
Hereafter shall times be to help the weak
And beat adown the strong. Yet make thy choice,
And either way well may thy heart rejoice."

And now when Randver rose to meet the King
His iron scabbard clashed against the board,

And a pang took his heart, for in its ring
Seemed unto him a warning word,
And o'er his heart strange thoughts unbidden poured
And he grew dizzy, till across a space
Of gold and fair things he saw Bikki's face.

And then, what say I? even as a blank
Waiting for somewhat did his vexed heart grow
And all the tumult of his spirit sank.
Within himself he said, Scarce did I know
This man's power erst. Yet did he feel as though
Something there was that craved for help from him,
And with vague pity did his eyes wax dim.

"O father," said he, at the last, "I choose
E'en that which seemeth to be most thy will,
My hope of glory at this tide to lose
The better all thy glory to fulfill:
And yet account me fain as ever still
To try myself amid the sweep of swords,
Nor deem my morning's speech but wind and words."

A short laugh laughed the King and said: "O son
Thanked be thou, as thy deeds shall be thy worth."
Then fierce wrath fell on Randver, all alone,
Deserted did he feel amid the mirth
Wherewith the hall rang, and a hollow dearth
Of all desire and hope there seemed to be,
On coming days he brooded balefully.

And he alone, he thought, was in such mood
Of all men there, though the King once or twice
Cast looks at him that boded nothing good,
And Bikki glanced at him with eager eyes
Not noted of him: so in mirthful wise
Passed on the feast triumphant to its end,
And somewhat nearer death did all men wend.

BY noon of the next day did Randver stand
Upon the ship's deck looking back to where
Quick lessening lay the hillsides of his land,
Striving to think if it were foul or fair
The aspect of the days to come—nought clear
Might he behold the road his feet must tread
Or know if hope his way adown it led.

At least the sense of weakness and defeat
That made his life seem ruined yesterday
Was dimmed withal: he felt as he might meet
Whatever trouble round his journey lay
Without complaint, and play out all the play
Hoping for little, fearing nought at all,
Till into time's waste all he was should fall.

Then Bikki came to him and said: "Fair lord,
Worse than my thought went matters yesternight.
The King has fools about him and some word
Has reached his ears from these in my despite
Nor might I strive this morn the thing to right
For fear of worsening them—Let be, for time
Shall help thee yet—high shall thy fortune climb:

"Because methinks I know thee such an one
Who will not strive a little thing to win,
Painfully doing what must needs be done
Hour by hour; but waiting to begin
Thou standest did the sky and earth raise din,
And Gods are on the earth—and then forsooth
The world shall see thy greatness and thy truth."

He turned away when he had spoken this
Not as one mocking him, and Randver stood
Wondering what in such great words was amiss
Spoken so gravely too—that scarce seemed good
Despite of that—and yet withal his mood

Was softened by that speech, and Bikki seemed
A better man than Randver erst had deemed.

So the time passed a ship-board: neither spoke
Much of the errand they were bound upon,
And Bikki never that past tale awoke
Of dream-brought longings, but of great things done
In days past spoke regretfully as one
Who still must be a useful drudge and thrall
To those on whom the world's good word should fall.

So sailing on ere eve of the sixth day
The shipmen saw King Jonak's land ahead
And in the morning midmost of a bay
Beset by mountains blue on either hand
They saw his city and made haste to stand
Toward shore, and ever as they neared the same
On every ship raised banners of great fame,

And o'er the shield-hung sides hung cloth of gold
And made the minstrels sweet and soft tunes sing;
And all men were arrayed fair to behold
Yet without sign of any warlike thing
As toward the town they sailed forth triumphing,
Save only that Prince Randver now was clad
In all the daintiest war-gear that he had.

A rich and goodly place it seemed to be,
Ships of strange fashion thronged the haven there,
And noble houses stood anigh the sea,
And up the slopes rose wall and tower fair
Guarding the many homes that therein were
From war and wrong. Then Bikki spake and said,
"A peaceful place mid the world's drearihead!

"Were it not good, fair lord, in such a place
Neath this fair sky a little while to dwell

Beholding through the long day's hours some face
Thou lovedst most of all, that loved thee well,
Letting the world go its wild ways to tell
Wild stories of the cruel hearts and strong
That weigh the world down with resistless wrong?"

Nought answered Randver, but with face a-glow
Went forward, for betwixt the craft that lay
Thick in the haven passed the galley now,
And he felt happy and the sunny day
Seemed rife with hope as in time past away
When each new waking up was bright and strange
And in his own right hand lay all life's change.

And now ashore with all their state they went,
And as along the much thronged street they passed
Folk wondered much what all this glory meant
And many a look on Randver maidens cast
And well nigh deemed that now belike at last
Some God long worshipped all unseen had come
To look upon his people in their home.

So in the King's hall were they made good cheer
When they had named themselves and land and lord,
And word was given them that the King would hear
Their speech if they had brought him any word
Concerning peaceful dealings or the sword
The morrow morn, when rested they should be
By food and sleep from tossing on the sea.

But the next morn in great state were they brought
Unto the King, and Bikki on the way
Spake unto Randver: "What is now thy thought
Concerning that which we shall see today?
Is not this like an old dream passed away
And half forgotten? Hark how the bells ring!
Most certainly this is a mighty King.

"Yet is thy father mightier—she may live
A noble life, this maiden." Red as blood
Waxed Randver as some answer he did give
Of little import; for it seemed nought good
That any man should know each changing mood
As this man knew it, and in pitying tone
Had Bikki spoken e'en as he had known

The swelling pity in the prince's heart.
Then Bikki spake again: "Yea and thou too
Art born methinks to play a noble part
Who thinking not of that which thou wilt do
Shalt some day find thyself betwixt the two,
Sorrow and ease, and scarcely made thy choice—
Thy heart a maid great-hearted shall rejoice."

Then Randver would have answered, but withal
Out blared the trumpets and the street they turned
Into the square that lay before the hall,
Upon the steps whereof the bright sun burned
With steel and gold—and sorely Randver yearned
Even as one would see his lady by
When some great deed he doeth mightily.

But in the hall deep shadowed did they wend
And as one in a dream did Randver see
A throne adown the steel grove's nether end
Whereon there sat arrayed majestically
A black-haired man not great, and by his knee
Upon the marble steps a youth there sat
Black-haired and short, and yet well-knit with that.

But by the King's right hand stood two men more,
Younger it seemed and of most mighty make,
Who with fierce grey eyes looked the Goth folk o'er
As though they had been ever fain to take
The spear and shield and deadly strife to wake

With men so well arrayed—yet did he gaze
Still as one dreaming for a woman's face.

And on the King's left hand did there sit one
A woman crowned upon a chair of state
From whose great eyes all restless grief was gone
Whose hands were folded ever as to wait
The hands that came not from the bonds of Fate;
Kind red her lips were yet, nor grown all white
The golden hair once wrought for man's delight.

Yea kind the eyes beneath the unwrinkled brow
Above the cheeks grown hollow, colourless,
That once were like the sky of dawn aglow.
Then many a thought on Randver's dream did press,
Scarce knew he if to fear or pity or bless
For Gudrun Giuki's daughter there he knew
And all the wild days she had laboured through.

No other woman there he saw, and while
He pondered dreamily on many a thing
Across King Jonak's face there came the smile
That well befits the visage of a king
When all his life goes forward triumphing,
And down the hall his voice came round and fair,
Meet for the glory that was gathered there.

"Good welcome to you, Goths, and chief of all
To thee, King's Son, whether thou comest here
To pass fair days with us in festival,
Or weighty matters of goodwill dost bear!
Yea welcome still if news of war and fear
Thou carriest, since every man's last day
Awaits him unseen on his changing way."

Then Randver spake rather from memory still
Of things that like a dream or an old tale

Hung round him than from any present will:
"All hail, O King! no news of war or bale
We bring thee, yet are earnest to prevail
In asking a great gift of thee, that yet
Scarce shall a worthier man than this one get

"Who asketh thee thereof now. King, men say
That in thine house there dwelleth such an one
That all the world holds not so fair a may
And her we ask—Is my speech well begun?
For if not, ere this glittering morning sun
Has come to his full height our oars shall smite
The green waves of your haven into white."

Then spake King Jonak somewhat eagerly:
"Yea for thyself then askest thou this maid?"
There seemed a murmuring in the air anigh,
Why not, why not? as Randver spake and said,
"The King my father all due things has weighed
And deemeth nothing may fulfill his bliss
Or cure past trouble save the gaining this.

"He sayeth also that thy realm is great
And rich, abiding ever in good peace,
But biddeth thee take heed of wavering fate,
To look around and note the world's disease,
And how the grey wolf howls through palaces
Where once a great lord scarce might raise his voice
Unless its sound should make the king rejoice;

"Therewith he bids thee call to mind how oft
Hermanaric's crest through doubt and fear hath shone,
The banner of the Goths been raised aloft
When some great folk must needs with day be done;
He asketh thee if thou wilt call him son
And from his restful scabbard draw his sword
If evil threats thee with thy lightest word."

A little space was silence now, the while
King Jonak with his exultation strove
That he might answer like a king; a smile
Somewhat the war-worn face of Bikki now did move,
And Randver's eyes met Gudrun's from above
[Bending] upon [him] with a doubtful gaze
Where fear and pity, yea e'en hate had place.

Then spake the King: "Thanks at the least we give
To thee for thy fair speech, prince; for thy sire,
Although we hope without his aid to live
And rule our folk in peace, yet we desire
Beyond all things to draw unto us nigher
So great a king whom all the world doth praise
For his great heart and life and happy days.

"Yet must we hold some counsel with our lords
This day at least, and making no delay
Give thee thine answer in all loving words
Whether we needs must answer Yea or Nay.
So with good heart take our good cheer today
And fair things for a memory of this morn."
Then forth on both sides were the fair gifts borne,

And men's eyes glistened such as looked for gain.
But 'twixt the King and Queen sat Randver now
Amid fair talk, although a restless pain,
Whose seed and root no troublous search would show,
Was at his heart and still on him did grow
Craving to be alone a little while,
All things about him seemed so base and vile—

All things save Gudrun who in kindly wise
Sat hearkening, whose faint smile would die away
At whiles e'en as the shimmering sunlight dies
About the noon of some wild rainy day,
At whiles she seemed as she her hand would lay

On his caressingly, then with a frown
And helpless look would let her hand fall down.

But howsoe'er betwixt these twain it went,
Or Bikki watching them, o'erlong it were
To tell of all the glee wherein was spent
That summer day. Joyous seemed all folk there,
Nor had the Goths seen anything more fair
Than the King's house arrayed all suddenly
For feast as if for men who need should die.

SO wore the day until the sun was low
And Randver in his chamber sat alone
At last, and felt the scented west wind blow
From out the garden, hearkening to the moan
Of the low surf, and song of thrushes grown
O'er joyous with the coming of the dew,
And the late 'wildered bees that scantly flew

From lily-flower to lime tree: sitting so
And pondering, did one smite upon the door
And entering bowed before him, bid him know
That fain the Queen was ere the day was o'er
To show him 'twixt the palace and the shore
How fair the birds sang. So he went with him
Just as the sea sucked down the sun's last rim.

A little time they went whenas they met,
Gudrun and he, alone between the trees
Not speaking much until a hand she set
Upon his shoulder and said: "Would the seas
Had been red flame to stay you, that some peace
I might have gained this latter end of life!
O me, O me, again beginneth strife!"

He shuddered and she said: "Thou knowest not,
For thou art young—art young—all hope thou hast,
I know thee that thy heart may well grow hot
With the sweet poison that for me is past
So long ago—poor man, thou shalt be cast
Into an endless sea of strife and ill
And good it were if I might save thee still."

"Lady," he said, "I wot not of thy words
What they should mean! my life is scarce begun;
I think indeed to try me mid the swords
When this vain day of court-serving is done:
But then—what then? all life beneath the sun
Is full of risk and trouble, little ruth
Is due to me slain mid the swords forsooth."

"Hearken," she said, "thou seemest true and brave
Though thou mayst deem but raving that I say:
A wise man and a true nearby I have
Called Ulf the Red; at morn of this same day
His long-ship ready for fair cruising lay
Nor did he stop save this same feast to see:
Now him and his and life I give to thee."

He started: "Surely," said he, "this I know
That thou wouldst have me straightway get me gone,
And in my mind a glimmering thought doth grow
That thou for some cause deemst me such an one
That I should cheat the man who sent his son
To win him bliss and honour—hastily
I speak, for haste within thy words doth lie."

"O haste enow," she said, "else might I tell
A many signs to thee whereby I deem
That most strong longing on thy spirit fell
Ere thou might'st know it, fostered by some dream
Awake or sleeping, or words that did seem

To hold up hope or pleasure to thine eyes—
How should I tell? but born in dreadful wise."

He said: "Tomorrow would I answer thee:
Fain would I commune with myself this night."
"Nay, ere men sleep begins the misery—
O man, O man! when thou hast her in thy sight
How shalt thou bear to let that dear delight
Pass without thee adown life's dismal road?
How shalt thou bear the unhelped lonely load?"

How sweet the eve was! twixt the garden trees
The new-risen moon showed now and sweeter scent
The lily cast forth neath the dewy breeze
And round their heads flittering the dusk bats went:
He hearkened and knew all her swift words meant,
But sweet and sweet and sweet they seemed to him,
No pain there seemed in them however dim.

His heart beat quick as with some joy new gained,
As silent there he stood awhile, the night
Strode on apace and the light west wind waned
And she stood silent watching him, till bright
The house 'gan glow with new-lit light on light
And noise of much folk hurrying to the hall,
For well nigh ready was the festival.

Then spake she in a low hard voice: "Vain love—
The vain love of my life and vainer still
The life that nothing other folk may move!
O Gods that make alive that ye may kill,
And give that ye may take away, your will
In other worlds should needs work something good
Since here your chosen dwell mid tears and blood!

"And now at last the image of old days
Drifts from me into mortal change and strife

Where this man seeing but flower-tangled ways
Pities not her nor me nor his own life,
And Sigurd has no memory of the wife—
Ah not his love, but she who dwelt with him
Ere yet the glory of the world waxed dim.

"Ah me how kind, how kind I might have been—
Had I been loved—" She sought his dreaming eyes
Amid the soft night's gathering dusk of green
Until strange passion in her breast 'gan rise
And on his breast she laid in eager wise
A trembling hand and cried: "Not all so ill
Thou choosest, son! short life with woe to fill

"And be beloved—and be beloved as I
Was never loved who yet for all good peace
I might, would cast no longing by
Nor change my misery for the world's increase
Of all good things!—O we at least with these
Will deal not waiting dully for the tide
When stripped and shivering death we must abide!"

Then from the palace out the trumpets blared,
And growing clamour came across the night,
And through the trees afar the torches flared
As seeking betwixt rose and lily white
The King's folk went. "Hearken," she said, "delight
Awaiteth many a careless man this eve,
And thou—thou goest thither to receive

"A strange new life that beareth death withal;
For doubt thou not thy wooing well hath sped,
And on thine offer King and lords did fall
As falls a starving man on new baked bread.
I hate thee not, yet would thou hadst been dead
A month agone! would that the Gothic land
Lay waste and kingless 'neath some conqueror's hand!

"Ah me I rave, yet hearken once again:
That councillor that on thy right [hand] stood,
Either my ancient foresight is all vain
Or thou and I from him may hope no good—
I know the eyes and mouth that thirst for blood."
Then as one wakened, toward her Randver turned,
And in his eyes a strange and new light burned.

He spake: "Thanks have thou, O great-hearted Queen,
For all thy words! Natheless thou wrongest me,
Whatever idle dreams in me have been,
If still thou deemest that on thine and thee
My hands shall lay the weight of misery.
For though thy Swanhild's loveliness should move
My dreamy fiery heart to utter love,

"Yet fear me not, for I might live worse life
Than such a love about with me to bear
To make my hands the stronger in all strife,
And make my heart the freer from all fear
Since I should care nought for what most men care—
Perchance at last to fall asleep and find
That she at last was grown mine own and kind.

"Be merrier, Queen, for where she goeth indeed
May I not serve her as a very friend
Where not unlike it is that she shall need
True heart to help her ere her life-days end,
So that we twain unto death's door may wend
With hands not touching aught, heart free from heart,
Yet scarcely lonely though so nigh apart."

She answered not save only with a sigh,
And in the dusk eve did he deem withal
He saw her smile; but those drew anigh
Who bore the torches, and the flowers did fall
Brushed by the stiff gold robes as toward the hall

They passed together, talking of such things
As well befit the lives of Queens and Kings.

HIGH feast in hall that eve, great joyance there
Of pageant and of song while men did eat.
The very maidens that the cups did bear
About the Gothic guests' adorned seat
Were clad in raiment for Kings' daughters meet,
And as the scented tapers burned away
From off their sides waned figures painted gay.

Scarcely the Goths deemed they had seen ere then
Such weight of gold and silver nobly wrought,
Or such rich raiment on the serving-men,
Or drank such goodly wine from far lands brought.
Shortly to say in glory passing thought,
Such careful state as though men's lives should last
For ever, to its midst that great feast passed.

Then flushed were men with glory and with wine,
And many rash words to their lips did rise
As more and more they deemed themselves divine;
But Randver sat with restless troubled eyes,
Glancing about aweary, anxious-wise,
From Bikki's laugh and the King's merry face
To Gudrun's sad set smile, till the glad place

Seemed filled with foolish shadows round about,
Dread lurking hate and guile and baffled love;
And yet a strange hope struggled with his doubt
And whiles his heart beat high with thought to prove
How yet his secret love the world should move,
For now at last he knew how it should be
When he that face the world's desire should see.

Now made the King a sign and forthwithal
Loud sang the horns shattering 'gainst the high

Adorned roof, and down the joyous hall
Was silence when their noise died utterly.
And then afar off a low melody
Sprang up and seemed drawing nigh but slow,
As if the folk who made it lingered now.

Then Randver noted Bikki grow right grave,
And how the Queen flushed and the King meanwhile
Seemed struggling all his kingly grace to save
From mere delight—and Randver a faint smile
Strove somewhat his wild faintness to beguile
And even this he said: If it should be
That all my hope was but vain mockery!

But amid this the music grew all loud,
The hall-doors swung aback and through them came
Into the hall so fair and strange a crowd
That the Goths' wonder has not any name;
For in their foremost did great tapers flame
And down the hall a day-like lustre shed
From hands of damsels white-clad, garlanded.

Then came the music, maids and children fair,
Flushed sweet with summer, bright-eyed with delight,
So clad that cantles of the meads seemed there
Whereas their raiment 'neath young limbs and light
Went wavering underneath the harp-strings bright,
And down the hall there came a marvellous scent
As though the summer through its portals went.

More maids withal, each holding in her hand
Lily or rose-bough, clad in such a wise
As though the summer never left the land
And they need hide but little from the eyes
Of the brown thrush hushed by the mysteries
Of moon-blessed woods now on the high tree swayed.

But round the hindermost of these were slung
Baskets of thin woven silver wherefrom they
Sweet rose-leaves on the marble pavement flung,
Making thereon a soft and odorous way
For feet that were to follow, and the day
Might well come back for midmost night to show
Her aspect that adown that path did go.

Gold-clad she was, gold-shod and crowned with gold,
So that her raiment like herself might seem
Too delicate for mere men to behold,
Yet she herself looked not like any dream,
Nay rather, mid the changing flush and gleam
Of moving limbs and waving raiment, she
Seemed the one noble fair reality.

I know not what within her eyes there was
More than in other sweet and passionate eyes,
I know not what across her mouth did pass
More than o'er others wrought in wondrous wise,
With what snare heaved the store-house of her sighs
More than another's wrought supremely fair:
Yet went all madness and desire there

Whereas she went adown the silent hall
Nor might one call her eager or at peace,
Nor stern nor kind, nor glad nor sorry at all,
Nor full of love nor lacking love's increase,
And yet above and ruling all of these
Not bound by love nor binding it but more
Herself the very love she did adore.

The hall was silent for a while, and then
Upleapt the Goths unto their feet, and high
Their wild shout rang and in the hands of men
Gleamed the white steel and tossed tumultuously
Round the white face of Randver; but one cry

Unheard amid the tumult had he given
As though his heart with unnamed pangs was riven.

Bikki himself was pale a little while
And a strange frown made dark his wide clear brow
That gave place soon unto a lip-made smile
The eyes might make no answer to: but now
She drew anigh. King Jonak flushed did grow
And raised his cup twice, then spake out and said:
"O King's son, have thou here the goodlihead

"That thou hast asked for for thy father's sake,
Knowing not what thou askedst; and thou maid,
Draw nigh unto him, give a kiss and take—
For he is now thy son." As the King said
These words, 'gan Gudrun tremble, and she laid
Her hands upon her chair as if to rise,
Gazing about with wild and wandering eyes.

But Randver, when he felt her hand in his
And all the heaven of her sweet lips drew nigh,
Faltered no more nor shrank away from bliss
When on his lips at last her lips did lie,
And when the little space had clean gone by
Wherein they touched so, a strange happy smile
The pallor of his changed face did beguile.

But she was changed and for a little space
Piteous and wild her eyes were, till at last
They met as in a dream her mother's face
Kind and imploring: then the anguish passed
From out her face and round about she cast
A glance by inner agony made cold
But durst no more the prince's eyes behold.

Yet must she sit betwixt him and her sire
And hearken to his voice and wonder how

Amid the bitterness of his desire
He spake of common things, for surely now
She did not fail her heart and his to know,
And she fell wondering when the time should be
When she alone his lonely eyes should see.

Strange minutes heavy laden to these twain
With bitterness and joy, so real, so strange,
Wherein now nothing more seemed left to gain,
Now nothing gained of all the wondrous change
Had left them yearning for, and still did range
From utter woe to utter bliss each heart,
So close they seemed now, now so far apart.

Meanwhile who noted them? Bikki talked loud
With flushed face, and the King sat glad and smiled
With lips and eyes and heart; Gudrun was bowed
Over the board as somewhat now beguiled
With thought of past days—and the joy waxed wild
Within the hall among the rest of folk
Until the pale dawn o'er the garden broke.

Then as a burnt-down torch out the feast flared,
And through the town and palace noisily
The guests unto their wonted dwellings fared;
Then in the gathering light o'er all did lie
Deep silence, but no rest of heart or eye
For those that love from all the world made lone,
Who lone of love lay now that hour was gone.

IN tilt and pageant and high feast went by
The next few days. Randver saw Swanhild oft
But never so but some one was anigh,
Whether he saw her glorious eyes aloft
Above the spears, or heard her speaking soft

Anigh him, or they passed so close that each
Might feel the other's breath their parched lips reach.

Howe'er they met still flickering shadows seemed
To part their hands and lips and hearts, and make
Their lives a dream without their own wills dreamed—
A dream that feverish pain should ne'er forsake,
Wherefrom perchance they never should awake,
With no more hope than hell, yet sweet indeed
As Heaven's ne'er parched, ne'er frozen, blessed mead.

So shall it be, thought Randver, many a day
Till all days end for us: must change needs be?
Why must we strive to cast this pain away
And in the gulf of all uncertainty
Go struggling till again we come to see
All things as others see them, with no hope,
With all the dread ourselves have made to cope?

IN ARTHUR'S HOUSE

IN Arthur's house whileome was I
When happily the time went by
In midmost glory of his days.
He held his court then in a place
Whereof ye shall not find the name
In any story of his fame:
Caerliel good sooth men called it not,
Nor London Town, nor Camelot;
Yet therein had we bliss enow.
—Ah, far off was the overthrow
Of all that Britain praised and loved;
And though among us lightly moved
A love that could but lead to death,
Smooth-skinned he seemed, of rosy breath,
A fear to sting a lady's lip,
No ruin of goodly fellowship,
No shame and death of all things good.

Forgive the old carle's babbling mood;
As here I sit grey-haired and old,
My life gone as a story told,
Ye bid me tell a story too;
And then the evil days and few,
That yet were overlong for me
Rise up so clear I may not see
The pictures of my minstrel lore.

WELL hearken! on a day of yore
From prime of morn the court did ride
Amidmost of the summertide
To search the dwellings of the deer
Until the heat of noon was near;
Then slackening speed awhile they went
Adown a ragged thorn-bushed bent
At whose feet grew a tangled wood

Of oak and holly nowise good:
But therethrough with some pain indeed
And rending of the ladies' weed
They won at last, and after found
A space of green-sward grown around
By oak and holly set full close;
And in the midst of it arose
Two goodly sycamores that made
A wide and little sun-pierced shade
About their high boles straight and green:
A fount was new-born there-between,
And running on as clear as glass,
Flowed winding on amid the grass
Until the thick wood swallowed it.
A place for happy folk to sit
While the hot day grew hotter still
Till eve began to work his will.
—So might those happy people think
Who grudged to see the red sun sink
And end another day of bliss
Although no joy tomorn should miss—
They laughed for joy as they drew nigh
The shade and fount: but lo, thereby
A man beside the fountain laid
The while his horse 'twixt sun and shade
Cropped the sweet grass: but little care
Had these of guile or giant's lair,
And scarce a foot before the Queen
Rode Gawain o'er the daisied green
To see what man his pleasure took;
Who rose up in meanwhile and shook
His tangled hair aback, as one
Who e'en but now his sleep hath done.
Rough-head and yellow-haired was he
Great-eyed, as folk have told to me,
And big and stout enow of limb:
As one who thinks no harm he smiled,

And cried out: "Well met in the wild,
Fair King and Queen; and ye withal
Sweet dames and damsels! Well befal
This day, whereon I see thee nigh,
O Lancelot, before I die!
And surely shall my heart rejoice
Sir Gawain, when I hear thy voice!"

Then Lancelot laughed: "Thou knowest us then
Full well among a many men?"

"As quoth the lion to the mouse,"
The man said; "in King Arthur's House
Men are not names of men alone,
But coffers rather of deeds done."

The Queen smiled blithe at heart, and spake:
"Hast thou done deeds for ladies' sake?"

"Nay dame," he said, "I am but young;
A little have I lived and sung
And seen thy face this happy noon."

The King said: "May we hearken soon
Some merry tale of thee? for I
Am skilled to know men low and high
And deem thee neither churl nor fool."

Said he, "My fathers went to school
Where folk are taught a many things,
But not by bliss: men called them kings
In days when kings were near to seek;
But as a long thread waxeth weak,
So is it with our house; and now
I wend me home from oaken bough
Unto a stead where roof and wall
Shall not have over far to fall

When their last day comes."
As he spake
He reddened: "Nathless for their sake,
Whom the world loved once, mock not me
O King, if thence I bring to thee
A morsel and a draught of wine,
Though nothing king-like here thou dine."

Of some kind word King Arthur thought,
But ere he spake the woodman caught
His forest-nag and leapt thereon,
And through the tangled brake was gone.
Then leapt the King down, glad at heart,
Thinking, This day shall not depart
Without some voice from days that were;
And lightly leapt down Guenevere,
And man and maid lay presently
Neath the bee-laden branches high,
And sweet the scent of trodden grass
Amid the blossoms' perfume was.

There long they lay, and little spake,
As folk right loth the calm to break;
Till lo upon the forest-breeze
A noise of folk, and from the trees
They came: the first-seen forester,
A grizzled carle in such-like gear,
And then two maidens poorly clad
Though each a silver chaplet had
And round her neck a golden chain:
And last two varlets led a wain
Drawn by white oxen well bedight
With oaken boughs and lilies white;
Therein there lay a cask of wine
And baskets piled with bread full fine,
And flesh of hart and roe and hare;
And in the midst upon a chair

In Arthur's House

Done over with a cloth of gold
There sat a man exceeding old
With long white locks: and clad was he
No other than his company
Save that a golden crown he bore
Full fairly fashioned as of yore,
And with a sword was girt about
Such as few folk will see I doubt.
Right great it was: the scabbard thin
Was fashioned of a serpent's skin,
In every scale a stone of worth:
Of tooth of sea-lion of the north
The cross was, and the blood-boot stone
That heals the hurt the blade hath done
Hung down therefrom in silken purse:
The ruddy kin of Niblung's curse
O'er tresses of a sea-wife's hair
Was wrapped about the handle fair;
And last a marvellous sapphire stone
Amidst of the great pommel shone,
A blue flame in the forest green.
And Arthur deemed he ne'er had seen
So fair a sword: nay not when he
The wonder of the land-locked sea
Drew from the stone that Christmas-tide.

Now forth the forest youth did ride,
Leapt down beside the King, and spake:
"King Arthur for thy greatness' sake
My grandsire comes to look on thee;
My father standeth here by me;
These maidens are my sisters twain;
My brethren draw out from the wain
Somewhat thy woodland cheer to mend."

Thereat his sire the knee did bend
Before the King, who o'er the brown

Rough sleeve of the man's homespun gown
Beheld a goodly golden ring:
And fell to greater marvelling
When he beheld how fine and fair
The woodman's kneeling sisters were.
And all folk thereby deemed in sooth
That (save indeed the first seen youth)
These folk were nobler e'en than those
Of Arthur's wonder of a house.

In Arthur's House

But now the elder drew anigh,
By half a head was he more high
Than Arthur or than Lancelot,
Nor had eld bent him: he kneeled not
Before the King, but smiling took
His hands in hands that nowise shook;
And the King joyed as he who sees
One of his fathers' images
Stand glad before him in a dream.

Then down beside the bubbling stream
They sat together, and the King
Was loth to fall a questioning;
So first the elder spake and said:

"It joys me of thy goodlihead
O great king of our land; and though
Our blood within thee doth not flow,
And I who was a king of yore
May scarcely kneel thy feet before,
Yet do I deem thy right the best
Of all the kings who rule the West.
I love thy name and fame: behold,
King Arthur, I am grown so old
In guilelessness, the Gods have sent,
Be I content or uncontent,
This gift unto my latter days

That I may see as through a haze
The lives and deeds of days to come:
I laugh for some, I weep for some—
I neither laugh nor weep for thee,
But trembling through the clouds I see
Thy life and glory to the end;
And how the sweet and bitter blend
Within the cup that thou must drink.
Good is it that thou shalt not shrink
From either: that the afterdays
Shall still win glory from thy praise
And scarce believe thee laid asleep
When o'er thy deeds the days lie deep."

He ceased but his old lips moved still,
As though they would the tale fulfil
His heart kept secret: Arthur's eyes
Gleamed with the pride that needs would rise
Up from his heart, and low he said:
"I know the living by the dead
I know the future by the past."
Wise eyes and kind the elder cast
Upon him; while a nameless fear
Smote to the heart of Guenevere,
And, fainting there, was turned to love:
And thence a nameless pain did move
The noble heart of Lancelot,
The store of longing unforgot.
—And west a little moved the sun
And noon began, and noon was done.

But as the elder's grey eyes turned
On Guenevere's, her sweet face burned
With a sweet shame; as though she knew
He read her story through and through.
Kindly he looked on her and said:

"O Queen, the chief of goodlihead, In Arthur's
Be blithe and glad this day at least House
When in my fathers' house ye feast:
For surely in their ancient hall
Ye sit now: look, there went the wall
Where yon turf ridge runs west-away:
Time was I heard my grand-dame say
She saw this stream run bubbling down
The hall-floor shut in trench of stone;
Therein she washed her father's cup
That last eve e'er the fire went up
O'er ridge and rafter and she passed
Betwixt the foemen's spears the last
Of all the women, wrapping round
This sword the gift of Odin's ground."

He shook the weapon o'er his knee,
Thereon gazed Arthur eagerly.
"Draw it, my lord," quoth Guenevere,
"Of such things have we little fear
In Arthur's house." And Lancelot rose
To look upon the treasure close.
But grimly smiled the ancient man:
"E'en as the sun arising wan
In the black sky when Heimdall's horn
Screams out and the last day is born,
This blade to eyes of men shall be
On that dread day I shall not see—"
Fierce was his old face for a while:
But once again he 'gan to smile
And took the Queen's slim lily hand
And set it on the deadly brand
Then laughed and said: "Hold this, O Queen,
Thine hand is where God's hands have been,
For this is Tyrfing: who knows when
His blade was forged? Belike ere men
Had dwelling on the middle-earth.

At least a man's life is it worth
To draw it out once: so behold
These peace-strings wrought of pearl and gold
The scabbard to the cross that bind
Lest a rash hand and heart made blind
Should draw it forth unwittingly."

Blithe laughed King Arthur: "Sir," said he,
"We well may deem in days by gone
This sword, the blade of such an one
As thou hast been, would seldom slide
Back to its sheath unsatisfied.
Lo now how fair a feast thy kin
Have dight for us and might we win
Some tale of thee in Tyrfing's praise,
Some deed he wrought in greener days,
This were a blithesome hour indeed."

"Sir," said the elder, "little need
To pray me hereof. Please ye dine
And drink a cup of woodman's wine,
Surely meantime some tale shall stir
Within my heart of days that were."

Then to their meat they gat and there
Feasted amid the woodland fair
The fairest folk of all the land.
Ah me when first the Queen's fair hand
Drew near the kneeling forest youth
New-wrought the whole world seemed in sooth
And nothing left therein of ill.
So at the last the Queen did fill
A cup of wine, and drank and said:
"In memory of thy fathers dead
I drink, fair lord, drink now with me
And then bethink thee presently
Of deeds that once won prize and praise
The glory of thy fathers' days."

He drank and laughed and said, "Nay, nay,
Keep we the peace-strings whole today.
This draught from where thy lips have been
Within mine old heart maketh green
The memory of a love full true,
The first recorded deed that drew
My fathers' house from dark to light.

If thus my grandame told aright,
A rougher place our land was then,
Quoth she, than with us living men,
And other trees were in the wood
And folk of somewhat other blood
Than ours: then were the small-eyed bears
More plenty in the woodland lairs
Than badgers now: no holiday
It was to chase the wolves away,
Yea there were folk who had to tell
Of lyngworms lying on the fell,
And fearful things by lake and fen,
And manlike shapes that were not men.
Then fay-folk roamed the woods at noon,
And on the grave-mound in the moon
Faint gleamed the flickering treasure-flame.
Days of the world that won no fame,
Yet now, quoth she, folk looking back
Across the tumult and the wrack
And swelling up of windy lies
And dull fool-fashioned cruelties,
Deem that in those days Gods abode
On earth and shared ill times and good
And right and wrong with that same folk
Their hands had fashioned for the yoke.
Quoth she, of such nought tells my tale,
Yet saith that such as should prevail
In those days o'er the fears of earth
Must needs have been some deal of worth,

And saith that had ye seen a kin
Who dwelt these very woods within
Them at the least ye would have told
For cousins of the Gods of old.
Amongst all these it tells of one,
The goodman's last-begotten son,
Some twenty summers old: as fair
As any flower that blossomed there
In sun and rain, and strong therewith
And lissom as a willow withe.
Now through these woods amidst of June
This youngling went until at noon
From out the thicket his fair face
Peered forth upon this very place;
For he had been a-hunting nigh
And wearied thought a while to lie
Beside the freshness of the stream.
But lo as in a morning dream
The place was changed, for there was dight
A fair pavilion blue and white
E'en where we play, and all around
Was talk of men and diverse sound,
Tinkling of bit and neigh of steed,
Clashing of arms and iron weed.
For round about the painted tent
Armed folk a many came or went,
Or on the fresh grass lay about.
Surely our youth at first had doubt
If 'twere not better to be gone
Than meet these stranger folk alone—
But wot ye well such things as these
Were new to him born mid the trees
And wild things: and he thought, Maybe
The household of the Gods I see:
Who for as many tales as I
Have heard of them, I ne'er saw nigh.
If they be men, I wotted not

That such fair raiment men had got; In Arthur's
They will be glad to show them then. House

For one thing taught these woodland men
Whatever wisdom they let fall
Men since have won Fear nought at all.

So from the holly brake he strode
Shouldering the while his hunter's load,
A new slain roe; but there arose
To meet him half a score of those
Whom in fair words he greeted well.

Now was he clad in a sheep's fell
And at his back his quiver hung,
His woodknife on his thigh: unstrung
His bow he held in a staff's stead.
An oaken wreath was round his head
From whence his crispy locks of brown
Well nigh unto his belt hung down,
And howso frank his eyes might be
A half-frown soothly might you see
As these men handled sword or spear
And cried out, "Hold, what dost thou here?"
"Ah," said he, "then no Gods ye are.
Fear not, I shall not make you war."
Therewith his hunting-knife he drew
And the long blade before them threw.
Then loud they laughed; one sheathed his sword:
"Thanks, army-leader, for that word!
We are not Gods e'en as thou say'st,
Nor thou a devil of the waste
But e'en a devil's friend belike."
Something [of] hate hereat did strike
Unto the woodman's unused heart,
Yet he spake softly for his part:
"What men are ye and where dwell ye?

What is the wondrous house I see?"
"In the fair southland is our home
Yet from the north as now we come,"
Said one: then with a mocking smile,
"And in our house there dwells awhile
A very Goddess of the north.
But lo you, take a thing of worth
For that thy quarry, and begone."

But as he spake another one
Spake softly in his ear: and so
The word from this to that did go,
With laughing that seemed nowise good
Unto the dweller of the wood,
Who saying nought moved toward the tent.
But they came round him as he went
And said: "Nay, pagan, stay thy feet;
Thou art not one our dame to greet

[ANTHONY]

On board ship off the coast of Norway: Anthony, Wulfstan the Shipmaster, *and* Sailors.

SHIPMASTER

WELL, master merchant, you slept late this morn
Despite our drawing nigh our journey's end—
Well, you did well perchance being among friends:
For one day at the least a steady wind,
A cloudless sky and all things going well.

ANTHONY

Why, but to hear you things go not so well
Since now I go ashore—among unfriends
You seem to say. Yet was your word before
That this Lord Rolf the Red was a good lord
To those who dealt in peaceful wise with him;
And in no warlike wise I come, meseems.

SHIPMASTER

There now again I note you—looking round
As though to find a man or two to smite—
That's still your way, and sooth it seems to me
The nigher you come to land the hotter grows
Your blood. I warn you this good lord withal
His sword-blade nowise grows unto its sheath
And he is one of many, lord or thrall
Tis much the same—life is cheap enow
And one man's blow is like another's still.
A second warning: try your mocks on them,
They will not laugh belike or say a word
Though the hall roars around them: you shall think
Them dull and go on piling jeer and jeer;
But two hours thence, two hours or days or months,
As time serves, you shall find they understood.
Warning the third: some things here shall be bought—

Anthony Most things—a sword, a house, a horse, a wife:
You may want all these things except the last,
And certes you are rich enough to deal.
—Take this by the way that they may well deal thus,
Sell you a sword and thrust you through therewith,
Sell you a house and burn it o'er your head,
Sell you a horse and steal it the next morn,
Sell you a wife and bid her loose her tongue
Until you make a red mark on her face—
And then the district-court and her tall kin
And point and edge, or clink of the King's sweet face
Outside your purse—Well all that by the way,
But this I mean by the third: all women here—
Yea how you start—are marked and known and named
Daughter of this goodman, sister of that
Nor will gold buy them save in open wise,
As wives I mean—though you indeed may deal
In wares that please them, if to help your face,
Your song, your story of old time, your dance,
You therewithal could play well with the sword,
Or throw your hair back in the face of death
To show your cheeks no paler for the sight—
Eh! do I make too long a tale; you scowl:
Why don't you ask me then to make an end?
Turn round and look, we've weathered the last ness.
Off half a point, you helmsman! There it is
The stead we were to bring you to—though why
You were so eager after this man's fame
I know not. Does it like you well or ill?

ANTHONY
A place to be forgotten in, it seems
The hill-sides like a wall, the deep green sea
The pine-trees all above it—so there dwells
The man who tears his gold from out the fire.

SHIPMASTER
Yea, fire full hot enow—lo there the hall
Big enough for a king, the water deep
Up to the garth-gate; there on the round hill
Thor's temple—may Christ curse it! the ship-stocks,
One, two, three cutters, one great merchant-ship
Just newly pitched—the long-ships neither there;
If I had not a sort of name of friend
With him and his, that would not like me well;
I would not care to meet him in the main.

ANTHONY
What then, the lord is gone away belike?

SHIPMASTER
Most like, but since the winter comes apace
Tis but a matter of ten days at most
Ere he come back unless his fiends, his Gods
Have got his soul at last.

ANTHONY
Nay, God forbid!

SHIPMASTER
Why art thou eager? wouldst thou see him live?

ANTHONY
Nay by the saints, but I would see him die—
Tell him my name first!

SHIPMASTER
There it all comes out.
I doubted this, fair merchant, God to aid
Thou hadst a look of Jonah in the face
E'en from the first; well, full certainly
There gapes the whale for thee stranded ashore,
But a dark cavern of ill hap.

ANTHONY

Good sooth,
Ill luck enow is still on my tongue's end
And in the corners of my eyes; what need
To say bewray me not, thou knowst not much—

SHIPMASTER

Why, [had] I said to Rolf thou wishedst him dead
He would laugh somewhat—drink nightlong with thee
And call thee to the ring of hazel wands
Wherein they fight next morn and then—

ANTHONY

What then?

SHIPMASTER

Is thy neck iron, he could cut it through,
E'en so I think; is thy sword as swift
As July lightning, three swords seem aloft
When his sword leaves the scabbard and he plays;
So say his own men, and our English folk
Have e'en such tales to tell of him at York
And Scarborough and Dunwich.

ANTHONY

Come thy ways
Below deck, shipmate, somewhat more away
From these long-eared east-countrymen, and then
You will soon learn the reason from my mouth
Why the mere killing him or being killed
Will not mend all for me.
Green unburnt slopes
Under the soft sun, smooth green waveless sea,
Too kind a world thou art for such as I.
When shall I bid farewell and learn what place
For such a restless helpless loveless man
Twixt lowest hell and highest heaven there is
Since earth is all at strife with all I am?

Thora, Margaret, Bower Maidens.

THORA

Well, maiden, such a tale as thou hast told
Two years agone I thought I could foresee
When first thine eyes 'gan look to woman's years,
And thou wouldst redden at a tale of love.
Trust me, I knew that when my lord had time
And thou wert riper, he would reach his hand
To take the fair fruit to him; day by day,
For a year past, I thought of sending thee
Unto my mother's brother in the North
Or out to Iceland to my father's kin:
But time passed, neither thee nor my lord Rolf
Seemed worth the pains, though neither him nor thee
Do I hate or could hate: nor for him methinks
We sit together in the hall nor know
Each of the other what is in our hearts
About us, and for thee the dull days here
Will drag from out me what had better lie
Quiet within my heart for thee—nay, nay,
I will not speak. I note thee ready now
To take my whole speech rash and lay it up
In that deep storehouse of thy mind.
Thorgerd,
Come hither, tell me how the fishing sped
Our folk came back from at the dawn.

[MAIDEN]

But ill,
Goodwife; they said they deemed the shoal
Had shifted and the sea was e'en too deep.

THORA

Thou sittest silent, Margaret, car'st not
For hate or love of mine?

MARGARET

Nay, if I could
Well would I love thee, if I needs must speak—
What say I? for I love thee well indeed
As slaves durst love: and thou art worthy love.

THORA

A many loves 'twixt a few common words,
And no man by to take one of them all.
But hearken, as for thee, I think, I fear
Thy smooth soft speech, thy voice so seldom raised
That dealeth not with great words, thy great eyes
That fall asleep and dream of far off things
E'en midst thy speech—thou shalt be dangerous
In love belike unto thyself and all
Who come across thee.

MARGARET

Lady, fear me not.
I do thy will—thou hast been kind to me,
And for the rest day comes and day goes by
And leaves me with nought done and nought to hope
And nought to fear even when all is said
That I have said e'en now.

THORA

As from a man's
That came from out thy lips, and well I deem
That if thou hadst a brother he and I
Might be fair friends a while.
Hearken, the horn
Sounds at the garth-gate; is my lord come back?

Enter a Servant.

SERVANT

Mistress, Wulfstan the English ship-master
Has anchored in the haven, and is here

Some six in company and prayeth thee
For harbourage for him and his awhile. Anthony

THORA

We shall have tidings then; go bid them in.
Well now the day shall go nowise so ill;
We shall have merry talk, news of our earl
And his last dealings with the English king.
Five years ago he sat a gold-haired youth
At the great wedding-feast where Rolf was God
And I was Goddess, and he kissed me then
The new wed wife of that same fostersire
Who bade me love him for the most of hope
Of all the men then waxing in the North.
He kissed me, and my heart felt soft to him
At first; I thought, when sixteen years are gone
Shall I have such a son to win the world?
Then something chilled my heart as I beheld
My husband's eager eye on him and me,
The youth he loved, the wife he had just won
And deemed a fair thing doubtless.
Southland may,
Almost would he have moved thy solemn heart;
Baldur come back to life again he seemed
A sun to light the dim hall's glimmering dusk—
What, sighest thou then?—I am babbling on
Before thy wisdom—Ah here come the guests.

Enter Wulfstan the Shipmaster, Anthony *and* Shipmen.

Welcome, my masters, and thou Wulfstan, first,
Good hast thou done to ours across the sea
And once again somewhat we pay thee back.
Lord Rolf had been right glad to see thee here
And hearken to thy tidings.

WULFSTAN

None the worse

Anthony We think to fare at thy hands than at his:
Be merry, for two gifts I bring today,
A bale of English linen for thy beds
And a fair winter-guest to make thy board
The merriest in Norway. Greet him well
For he is worthy of it, a rich man
Of noble Southland kin and yet withal
A merchant of all merchants—and thou, friend,
Behold a woman noble as she seems,
Kind, wise and open-handed, craving still
For honour and for knowledge: greet her well.

THORA
Nay Wulfstan, we shall get to verses soon;
Content thee, man, two Icelanders we have
To set the big words going. Verily
I am right glad to see thee and thy friend;
The winter shall be merrier for his words
I doubt me not. Thou lookest round, fair Sir
As if thou wonderest whither thou art come.
Thou hast seen Southland kings and all their state
And deemest us of small account belike,
Yet are we merry at whiles.

ANTHONY
Hail, most fair dame!
Kings' courts hold men and women gaily clad,
Soft words of priests and bitter lies and change,
But few names more redoubted than thy lord's,
And few—no eyes methinks as bright as thine.
Yea, this fair hall should be a happy place.
Aside. The Welshman lied not: she is changed indeed
From the slim joyous maiden of twelve years
And looks my mother of fifteen summers back
Come from the dead to gaze with mournful eyes
Upon the ashes of her house. Yet strange
She doth not seem to know me—Would that I

Had come upon this torment of the seas, Anthony
Whose death is my desire, amid his men
Flushed with his wealth and wine; for certainly
Peace seems about the place: these red-lipped girls,
Shock-headed herds not all too full of work,
That song without, the smiles here, that soft hand
And ready welcome—Would that we were gone
And they at peace as now.

THORA

And yet, fair Sir,
Your soft speech well said, merely on the ground
Your eyes are fixed. Well, some unburied grief
Perchance you left behind you in your land
And think you are a long way off from it,
And deem our coming winter but a sign
Of mortal separation from all love,
As I have done at whiles.

ANTHONY

In kindly wise
Thou speakest to me. Thirty-five years past
I first saw light, and in our land God wot
That is a long time to be free from grief—
But all shall go well now. *Aside.* A kind soft place
For me to ruin like my father's house
The soft-winged owl will through to-night!

WULFSTAN

Well lady, if you could turn to me
From this fair Southlander, then might your ears
Hear tidings from the West that touch on you.

THORA

What tidings?

WULFSTAN

These, that Sigurd your young earl,

Anthony My lord Rolf's fosterson, when spring comes round
Saileth for home bearing the good word
Of all men, and great fame that shall endure
And gold enow for anyone but him
Who deems himself Lord God to give away
Whate'er he has, yet never to grow less.

THORA
Great tidings, Wulfstan. *Aside.* How the bondmaid stares
Upon the guest! a fine man but a proud;
He looks as though he somewhat hated me
Already—Who shall love me? O fair Sir
Sawest thou Earl Sigurd at the English King's?

ANTHONY
Nay, lady.

WULFSTAN
Now by all the saints of heaven
Thy wits are gathering wool upon the downs!
When first I saw thee thou didst stand three feet
From the Earl's nose, wert telling him long tales
Of Sicily and the isles, the day I came
To pray for his good word in Norway here.

THORA
Well, if [thou] wakedst then, fair guest, say now
How thou deemest of him?

ANTHONY
A tall man was he,
Bright cheeked and fair haired, glib enow of speech;
Men called him a good swordsman.

WULFSTAN
O my merchant-friend,
No need to cheapen him so eagerly,
We sell no earls here.

THORA

Anthony

Friends and guests, come forth
Unto the great hall, for the boards by now
Should be well laid. Yea now the horns blow up;
Come, whatso things tomorrow's sun may bring,
Tonight at least shall see us somewhat glad
Drinking the grave-ales of our joys bygone,
Our hopes too bright to bear three noonday suns.

A Wood near the House.

Anthony, Margaret.

MARGARET

Thanks to the beech-boughs we are deep enough
Amongst them now to turn eyes each to each—
O brother with the eyes of the old days
Kiss me and bring the old hope back again
And half forgotten scents of Southland things!

ANTHONY

Or bring thou back unto the lonely man
Foiled, unloved and unloveable, that tide
A month belike or our last parting day,
That morning of the South wherein we sat
Anigh the tideless sea beneath the wall
Whereon the rose-laurel grew.

MARGARET

I was twelve then,
I had known no sorrow—yet as children use
To be saddened by the sound of bells or song
And try to shake from them the first sweet pain,
That as time wears is all the joy belike
That they may hope for, so there hung on me
A vague disquiet that day long ago.

ANTHONY
It showed not in thee, rather joy in life,
Sweet, healthful, strong, burned in thee as I deemed,
The gift we waste, the seed of the longings vain
That poison all when at the last we know
That God has made each one of us as lone
As he himself sits, crying out for love
Through mouths of loveless prophets, unwed priests,
Through all his judgments on the dreadful word,
Yet if we meet in hell 'tis good to meet—
Thou lookest hard: a vile sour face it is,
Thy brother's face, but shows not all the worst.
Yet I am glad thou lovest me.

MARGARET
No face
Here have I seen as dear a long, long while;
Help in a helpless place it bringeth me.
Thou art great-hearted.

ANTHONY
Ah, if it were so
And the world might go its ways while I abode
Embraced by some great love, not heeding pain
Or fearing change. With thee it might be so.
Thou art grown wondrous fair, calm are thine eyes,
Strong seemest thou all grief well to endure
And grow the fairer—

MARGARET
Brother, let us talk
Of how the world goes, and thou first, and all
That thou hast dealt with since our parting day.

ANTHONY
Nay first of thee, since a free [man] thou seest me
And rich, while thou—while thou—

How shall I say it? art a bondmaid here. Anthony
Tell me about thy life.

MARGARET

Little to tell
After that first time when my young heart found
The misery undreamed of and I saw
As in a picture of the very hell
The red flame blazing strong against the sky,
The cloudless sunny sky, and all about
Betwixt the hot deck and the flapping sail
The great-limbed fearful sailors stained with blood,
Redfaced hoarse-voiced and restless, mad with blood
And gain of gold and joy of their lives gained
After the battle, deeming the earth made
For them alone. Small wonder that the men
The Duke sent for our father's guard and help
Shrank back before them, being what well you know,
Door-keepers, varlets, full-fed, purblind knaves
Taking their ease as the world takes sunrise,
A thing that God has made once to endure;
These rather were like dreadful Gods—the fight?
I saw it not; a lad of fifteen years
With a great axe all bloody dragged us down,
Me and my nurse, into the Castle-yard—
O what a dreadful place it seemed that day
Filled with the clamour of the barbarous tongue
And clash of arms and crash of things thrown down
From out the windows, groans of dying men
And sobs and wails, and now and then a scream
Of sudden pain. By their chief there lay
A dead man well nigh covered with a cloth,
But from beneath it was a hand thrust forth,
The dead hand of my father; on the ground,
Without a wound but with their hands bound, sat
Some thirty men, the Duke's folk, waiting death
Or so they thought, and calm enow indeed

Anthony Now no more was to do. The women stood
Huddled together each in her own way,
As I belike, deeming that now she knew
What the world will be on that day of days
When o'er hushed town, and useless fruitful fields
The Judge's face shows dreadful—Well, the chief
When I was brought before him stared a while
Into my wan face, then in grave voice said,
"A great man's child; had there been twenty such
As she and he a nobler tune belike
Our fiddles might have played." Then he cried out,
"Eric the skald, good skill thou deemst thou hast
In ways of women, choose thou ten of these
That like thee best besides this noble may."
Then forth there stood a huge red-headed man
And grinning went up to the trembling band
And drew forth nine of all the fairest there,
But therewithal a palsied withered crone
Our porter's grand-dame. Then a huge laugh burst
From out the seafarers who stood round, and the chief
Said, "Tell us, Eric, why must we bear forth
This great-mouthed toothless porridge-eater then?"
"Nay," said he, "I have chosen her for thee,
For she looked old and wise to teach thee well
How big a fool thou art to give such choice
Unto another." Midst the laugh I heard
The lord say: "Nay, for this Valkyria here
Shall be my darling some four summers hence

WRITTEN IN A COPY OF THE EARTHLY PARADISE, DEC. 25, 1870

SO many stories written here
And none among them but doth bear
Its weight of trouble and of woe!
Well may you ask why it is so;
For surely neither sour nor dull
In such a world, of fair things full,
Should folk be.
Ah, my dears, indeed
My wisdom fails me at my need
To tell why tales that move the earth
Are seldom of content and mirth.
Yet think if it may come of this—
That lives fulfilled of ease and bliss
Crave not for aught that we can give,
And scorn the broken lives we live;
Unlike to us they pass us by,
A dying laugh their history.
But those that struggled sore, and failed
Had one thing left them, that availed
When all things else were nought—
E'en Love—
Whose sweet voice, crying as they strove,
Begat sweet pity, and more love still,
Waste places with sweet tales to fill;
Whereby we, living here, may learn
Our eyes toward very Love to turn,
And all the pain it bringeth meet
As nothing strange amid the sweet:
Whereby we too may hope to be
Grains in the great world's memory
Of pain endured, and nobleness
That life ill-understood doth bless.

Written in a copy of the Earthly Paradise

Words over-grave and sad for you
Maybe: but rime will still be true
Unto my heart—most true herein
In wishing, dear hearts, you may win
A life of every ill so clear,
That little tale for folk to hear
It may be: yet so full of love,
That e'en these words your hearts may move,
Years and years hence, when unto me
Life is a waste and windless Sea.

VERSES FOR THE MONTHS EARTHLY PARADISE

MARCH

IN March, when the gold-bringing east wind blows
And bright and cloudless is the pale blue sky,
And day by day the sunset later grows,
And on red hedges green buds you may spy,
On such a day of March, when eve was nigh,
In a fair hall, those old men sat talking
With people of the land; and many a thing

Of ancient stories, each to other told;
Till for sweet youth and unforgotten land
The strangers sighed, and longings manifold
Possessed the strong ripe men that there did stand
Half shamefaced; and young lovers hand in hand
Sat silent, feeling the sweet tears arise
Into their happy, longing, youthful eyes.

APRIL

SOFT is the air in the sweet April-tide,
When all day long the small brown thrushes sing
And sings the blackbird in the coppice side
And ever is the cuckoo on the wing.
Then were these old folk fain to welcome spring
And [in] an open southern chamber sat
One April morn and talked of this and that.

And in that morn to make their old hearts glad
With people of the land they drank well there,
Yet none the less, distraught they seemed and sad,
Although the promise of the spring was fair
And soft the April wind blew in their hair.
There in low voices these old tales they told
Remembered but in songs and ballads old.

MAY

THE might of Love, and all his triumphing,
They told in Maytide, and yet therewithal,
Since to the wars he goeth, like every king,
They told of troubles too that needs must fall
Upon the faithful servants he doth call.
When they were dead and gone, on many a time
These tales were told in May beneath the lime;

For to a lover joy it is to lie
And watch his lady's face change here and there,
While moves the verse along melodiously
Through tales that tell of love and ladies fair;
Or see her blush from little chin to hair
When gentle longing for the end of day
The sweet words move, or the sweet flowery May.

HAPLESS LOVE

HIC

WHY do you sadly go alone,
O fair friend? Are your pigeons flown,
Or has the thunder killed your bees,
Or he-goats barked your apple-trees?
Or has the red-eared bull gone mad,
Or the mead turned from good to bad?
Or did you find the merchant lied
About the gay cloth scarlet-dyed?
And did he sell you brass for gold,
Or is there murrain in the fold?

ILLE

Nay, no such thing has come to me.
In bird and beast and field and tree,
And all the things that make my store,
Am I as rich as e'er before;
And no beguilers have I known
But Love and Death; and Love is gone,
Therefore am I far more than sad,
And no more know good things from bad.

HIC

Woe worth the while! Yet coming days
May bring another, good to praise.

ILLE

Nay, never will I love again,
For loving is but joyful pain
If all be at its very best;
A rose-hung bower of all unrest;
But when at last things go awry,
What tongue can tell its misery?
And soon or late shall this befall—
The Gods send death upon us all.

HIC
Nay, then, but tell me how she died,
And how it did to thee betide
To love her; for the wise men say
To talk of grief drives grief away.

ILLE
Alas, O friend, it happed to me
To see her passing daintily
Before my homestead day by day—
Would she had gone some other way!
For one day, as she rested there
Beneath the long-leaved chestnuts fair,
In very midst of mid-day heat,
I cast myself before her feet,
And prayed for pity and for love.
How could I dream that words could move
A woman? Soft she looked at me:
"Thou sayest that I a queen should be,"
She answered with a gathering smile;
"Well, I will wait a little while;
Perchance the Gods thy will have heard."

And even with that latest word,
The clash of arms we heard anigh;
And from the wood rode presently
A fair knight well apparelled.
And even as she turned her head,
He shortened rein, and cried aloud:
"O beautiful, among the crowd
Of queens thou art the queen of all!"

But when she let her eyelids fall,
And blushed for pleasure and for shame,
Then quickly to her feet he came,
And said, "Thou shalt be queen indeed;
For many a man this day shall bleed

Because of me, and leave me king
Ere noontide fall to evening."

Then on his horse he set the maid
Before him, and no word she said
Clear unto me, but murmuring
Beneath her breath some gentle thing,
She clung unto him lovingly;
Nor took they any heed of me.

Through shade and sunlight on they rode
But 'neath the green boughs I abode,
Nor noted aught that might betide.
The sun waned and the shade spread wide;
The birds came twittering overhead;
But there I lay as one long dead.

But ere the sunset, came a rout
Of men-at-arms with song and shout,
And bands of lusty archers tall,
And spearmen marching like a wall,
Their banners hanging heavily,
That no man might their blazon see;
And ere their last noise died away,
I heard the clamour of the fray
That swelled and died and rose again;
Yet still I brooded o'er my pain
Until the red sun nigh was set,
And then methought I e'en might get
The rest I sought, nor wake forlorn
Midst fellow-men the morrow morn;
So forth I went unto the field,
One man without a sword or shield.
But none was there to give me rest,
Tried was it who was worst and best,
And slain men lay on every side;
For flight and chase were turned aside,

And all men got on toward the sea.
But as I went right heavily
I saw how close beside the way
Over a knight a woman lay
Lamenting, and I knew in sooth
My love, and drew a-near for ruth.

There lay the knight who would be king
Dead slain before the evening,
And ever my love cried out and said,
"O sweet, in one hour art thou dead
And I am but a maiden still!
The Gods this day have had their will
Of thee and me; whom all these years
They kept apart: that now with tears
And blood and bitter misery
Our parting and our death might be."

Then did she rise and look around,
And took his drawn sword from the ground
And on its bitter point she fell—
No more, no more, O friend, to tell!
No more about my life, O friend!
One course it shall have to the end.

O Love, come from the shadowy shore,
And by my homestead as before
Go by with sunlight on thy feet!
Come back, if but to mock me, sweet!

HIC
O fool! what love of thine was this,
Who never gave thee any kiss,
Nor would have wept if thou hadst died?
Go now, behold the world is wide:
Soon shalt thou find some dainty maid
To sit with in thy chestnut shade,

To rear fair children up for thee,
As those few days pass silently,
Uncounted, that may yet remain
'Twixt thee and that last certain pain.

Hapless Love

ILLE
Art thou a God? Nay, if thou wert,
Wouldst thou belike know of my hurt,
And what might sting and what might heal?
The world goes by 'twixt woe and weal
And heeds me not; I sit apart
Amid old memories. To my heart
My love and sorrow must I press;
It knoweth its own bitterness.

THE MOTHER UNDER THE MOULD

1

SVEND DYRING rode on the island-way
Yea have I not myself been young,
And there he's wedded so fair a may
Fair words give joy to many a heart.

2

Seven years the twain together sat
And children six between them gat.

3

Then came a death into the land
And died that lovely lily-wand.

4

Then Svend he rode on the island-way
And there he's wedded another may,

5

He's wedded a may and home is she
As grim and evil as may be.

6

When she came a-driving to the door
There stood the six babies weeping sore,

7

There stood they weeping many a tear,
With her foot she thrust them forth from her.

8

She gave them neither ale nor meat:
O ye shall have both hunger and hate.

9

She took from them the bolster blue,
Said, [In] the bare straw lie alow.

10

She's taken from them the great wax lights:
In murk house shall ye lie anights.

11

Late in the eve the bairns they grat,
The Mother under the Mould heard that.

12

That heard she under earth as she lay:
O now must I to my babes away.

13

Then did she stand the Lord before:
O may I go see my babes once more?

14

So long there did she stand and pray
That the Lord let her go her way.

15

But come thou back at cock-crow-tide,
No longer away must thou abide.

16

Then forth her weary feet put she
To meet both wall and imagery.

17

But when she came unto the stead
Under the sky the hounds they bayed,

18

And when to the door she drew near-hand
There did her eldest daughter stand.

19

O daughter mine, why stand'st thou there,
How do thy little brethren fare?

20

Thou art never Mother of mine,
For ever was she fair and fine.

21

My Mother was white with cheeks full red,
But thou art pale and like the dead."

22

O how should I be fine and fair,
For dead folk all pale cheeks must bear.

23

O how should I be white and red
So long as I've been cold and dead.

24

But when she came to the chamber door,
There were [the] bairns and grat right sore.

25

The first she brushed, the second she plaited,
The third she dandled, the fourth she patted,

26

The fifth upon her breast she set
As though sweet food it thence should get.

27

Then to her eldest daughter said she,
Go bid Svend Dyring come to me.

28

So when within the hall he stood
She spake to him in wrathful mood.

29

I left behind me ale and bread
Yet must my babes [of both] have need.

30
Bolsters blue did I leave enow,
In the bare straw lie my babes alow.

31
I left behind me waxlights high
But in chamber dark must my little ones lie.

32
Look to it that if I come once more
Ill fate for you there lieth in store.

33
But now is the red red cock a crowing
And under the earth must the dead be a going,

34
Now croweth the black cock on high
And heaven's gate openeth presently.

35
And now the white cock croweth clear,
No longer is there biding here.

36
So every time the hounds they bayed
They gave the children ale and bread.

37
No sooner did they hear them bay
But they thought the dead was on the way.

38
The hound's voice did they no sooner hear
Than sure they thought the dead was there.

SAD-EYED AND SOFT AND GREY

SAD-EYED and soft and grey thou art, O morn!
Across the long grass of the marshy plain
Thy west wind whispers of the coming rain,
Thy lark forgets that May is grown forlorn
Above the lush blades of the springing corn,
Thy thrush within the high elm strives in vain
To store up tales of spring for summer's pain—
Vain day, why wert thou from the dark night born?

O many-voiced strange morn, why must thou break
With vain desire the softness of my dream
Where she and I alone on earth did seem?
How hadst thou heart from me that land to take
Wherein she wandered softly for my sake
And I and she no harm of love might deem?

RHYME SLAYETH SHAME

IF as I come unto her she might hear,
If words might reach her when from her I go,
Then speech a little of my heart might show,
Because indeed nor joy nor grief nor fear
Silence my love; but her gray eyes and clear,
Truer than truth, pierce through my weal and woe;
The world fades with its woods, and naught I know
But that my changed life to My Life is near.

Go, then, poor rhymes, who know my heart indeed,
And sing to her the words I cannot say,—
That Love has slain Time, and knows no today
And no tomorrow; tell her of my need,
And how I follow where her footsteps lead,
Until the veil of speech death draws away.

MAY GROWN A-COLD

O CERTAINLY, no month this is but May!
Sweet earth and sky, sweet birds of happy song,
Do make thee happy now, and thou art strong,
And many a tear thy love shall wipe away
And make the dark night merrier than the day,
Straighten the crooked paths and right the wrong,
And tangle bliss so that it tarry long.
Go cry aloud the hope the Heavens do say!

Nay what is this? and wherefore lingerest thou?
Why sayest thou the sky is hard as stone?
Why sayest thou the thrushes sob and moan?
Why sayest thou the east tears bloom and bough?
Why seem the sons of man so hopeless now?
Thy love is gone, poor wretch, thou art alone!

AS THIS THIN THREAD

AS this thin thread upon thy neck shall lie
So on thy heart let my poor love abide
Not noted much, and yet not cast aside;
For it may be that fear and mockery
And shame, earth's tyrants, the thin thing shall try
Nor scorch therefrom what little worth may hide
Amidst its pettiness, till fully tried
Time leaves it as a thing that will not die.

Then hearken! thou who forgest day by day
No chain, but armour that I needs must wear
Although at whiles I deem it hard to bear,
If thou to thine own work no hand will lay,
That which I took I may not cast away,
Keep what I give till Death our eyes shall clear.

SONG

TWAS one little word that wrought it,
One sweet pang of pleasure bought it;
Long 'twixt heart and lips it hung
Till too sore the heart was wrung,
Till no more the lips might bear
To be parted, yet so near—
Then the darkness closed around me
And the bitter waking found me
Half forgotten, unforgiven and alone.

Hearken: nigher still and nigher
Had we grown, methought my fire
Woke in her some hidden flame
And the rags of pride and shame
She seemed casting from her heart,
And the dull days seemed to part;
Then I cried out, Ah, I move thee
And thou knowest that I love thee—
—*Half forgotten, unforgiven and alone.*

Yea, it pleased her to behold me
Mocked by tales that love had told me,
Mocked by tales and mocked by eyes
Wells of loving mysteries;
Mocked by eyes and mocked by speech
Till I deemed I might beseech
For one word, that scarcely speaking
She would snatch me from that waking,
Half forgotten, unforgiven and alone.

All is done—no other greeting,
No more sweet tormenting meeting,
No more sight of smile or tear,
No more bliss shall draw anear

Hand in hand with sister pain— Song
Scarce a longing vague and vain—
No more speech till all is over
Twixt the well-beloved and lover
Half-forgotten, unforgiven and alone.

WHY DOST THOU STRUGGLE

WHY dost thou struggle, strive for victory
Over my heart that loveth thine so well?
When Death shall one day have its will of thee
And to deaf ears thy triumph thou must tell.

Unto deaf ears or unto such as know
The hearts of dead and living wilt thou say:
A childish heart there loved me once, and lo
I took his love and cast his love away.

A childish greedy heart! yet still he clung
So close to me that much he pleased my pride
And soothed a sorrow that about me hung
With glimpses of his love unsatisfied—

And soothed my sorrow—but time soothed it too
Though ever did its aching fill my heart
To which the foolish child still closer drew
Thinking in all I was to have a part.

But now my heart grown silent of its grief
Saw more than kindness in his hungry eyes:
But I must wear a mask of false belief
And feign that nought I knew his miseries.

I wore a mask, because though certainly
I loved him not, yet was there something soft
And sweet to have him ever loving me:
Belike it is I well-nigh loved him oft—

Nigh loved him oft, and needs must grant to him
Some kindness out of all he asked of me
And hoped his love would still hang vague and dim
About my life like half-heard melody.

He knew my heart and over-well knew this
And strove, poor soul, to pleasure me herein;
But yet what might he do some doubtful kiss
Some word, some look might give him hope to win.

Why dost thou struggle

Poor hope, poor soul, for he again would come
Thinking to gain yet one more golden step
Toward Love's shrine, and lo the kind speech dumb
The kind look gone, no love upon my lip—

Yea gone, yet not my fault, I knew of love
But my love and not his; how could I tell
That such blind passion in him I should move?
Behold I have loved faithfully and well;

Love of my love so deep and measureless
O lords of the new world this too ye know

O FAR AWAY TO SEEK

O FAR away to seek, Close-hid for heart to find,
O hard to cast away, Impossible to bind!
A pain when sought and found, A pain when slipped away,
Yet by whatever name, Be nigh us, Love, today.

Sweet was the summer day, Before thou camest here,
But never sweet to me, And Death was drawing near!
Is it summer still? What meaneth the word Death,
What meaneth all the joy Thy mouth, Love, promiseth?

Wherefore must thou babble Of thy finding me alone?
What is this idle word, That thou may'st yet be gone?
Laugh, laugh, Love, as I laugh, When mine own love kisseth me
And saith no more of bliss Twixt lips and lips shall be.

O Love, thou hast slain time, How shall he live again?
We bless thy bitter wound, We bless thy sleepless pain—
Hope and fear slain each of each Doubt forgetting all he said
Death in some place forgotten Lingering, and half dead.

When my hand forgets her cunning I will loose thee, Love, and pray
—Ah and pray to what—For a never-ending day,
Where we may sit apart, Hapless, undying still,
With thoughts of the old story Our sundered hearts to fill.

OUR HANDS HAVE MET

OUR hands have met, our lips have met,
Our souls—who knows when the wind blows
How light souls drift mid longings set,
If thou forget'st, can I forget
The time that was not long ago?

Thou wert not silent then, but told
Sweet secrets dear—I drew so near
Thy shamefaced cheeks grown overbold,
That scarce thine eyes might I behold!
Ah was it then so long ago!

Trembled my lips and thou wouldst turn
But hadst no heart to draw apart,
Beneath my lips thy cheek did burn—
Yet no rebuke that I might learn;
Yea kind looks still, not long ago.

Wilt thou be glad upon the day
When unto me this love shall be
An idle fancy passed away,
And we shall meet and smile [and] say
"O wasted sighs of long ago!"

Wilt thou rejoice that thou hast set
Cold words, dull shows 'twixt hearts drawn close,
That cold at heart I live on yet,
Forgetting still that I forget
The priceless days of long ago?

FAIR WEATHER AND FOUL

SPEAK nought, move not, but listen, the sky is full of gold,
No ripple on the river, no stir in field or fold,
All gleams but nought doth glistèn, but the far-off unseen sea.

Forget days past, heart broken, put all thy memory by!
No grief on the green hill-side, no pity in the sky,
Joy that may not be spoken fills mead and flower and tree.

Look not, they will not heed thee, speak not, they will not hear,
Pray not, they have no bounty, curse not, they may not fear,
Cower down, they will not heed thee; long-lived the world shall be.

Hang down thine head and hearken, for the bright eve mocks thee still:
Night trippeth on the twilight, but the summer hath no will
For woes of thine to darken, and the moon hath left the sea.

Hope not to tell thy story in the rest of grey-eyed morn,
In the dawn grown grey and rainy, for the thrush ere day is born
Shall be singing to the glory of the day-star mocking thee.

Be silent, worn and weary, till their tyranny is past,
For the summer joy shall darken, and the wind wail low at last,
And the drifting rack and dreary shall be kind to hear and see.

Thou shalt remember sorrow, thou shalt tell all thy tale
When the rain fills up the valley, and the trees amid their wail
Think far beyond tomorrow, and the sun that yet shall be.

Hill-side and vineyard hidden, and the river running rough,
Toward the flood that meets the northlands, shall be rest for thee enough
For thy tears to fall unbidden, for thy memory to go free.

Rest then, when all moans round thee, and no fair sunlitten lie
Maketh light of sorrow underneath a brazen sky,
And the tuneful woe hath found thee, over land and over sea.

LATE POEMS

THE PILGRIMS OF HOPE

THE MESSAGE OF THE MARCH WIND

FAIR now is the springtide, now earth lies beholding
With the eyes of a lover the face of the sun;
Long lasteth the daylight, and hope is enfolding
The green-growing acres with increase begun.

Now sweet, sweet it is through the land to be straying
Mid the birds and the blossoms and the beasts of the field;
Love mingles with love, and no evil is weighing
On thy heart or mine, where all sorrow is healed.

From township to township, o'er down and by tillage
Far, far have we wandered and long was the day,
But now cometh eve at the end of the village,
Where over the grey wall the church riseth grey.

There is wind in the twilight; in the white road before us
The straw from the ox-yard is blowing about;
The moon's rim is rising, a star glitters o'er us,
And the vane on the spire-top is swinging in doubt.

Down there dips the highway, toward the bridge crossing over
The brook that runs on to the Thames and the sea.
Draw closer, my sweet, we are lover and lover;
This eve art thou given to gladness and me.

Shall we be glad always? Come closer and hearken:
Three fields further on, as they told me down there,
When the young moon has set, if the March sky should darken,
We might see from the hill-top the great city's glare.

Hark, the wind in the elm-boughs! From London it bloweth,
And telling of gold, and of hope and unrest;
Of power that helps not; of wisdom that knoweth,
But teacheth not aught of the worst and the best.

Of the rich men it telleth, and strange is the story
How they have, and they hanker, and grip far and wide;
And they live and they die, and the earth and its glory
Has been but a burden they scarce might abide.

Hark! the March wind again of a people is telling;
Of the life that they live there, so haggard and grim,
That if we and our love amidst them had been dwelling
My fondness had faltered, thy beauty grown dim.

This land we have loved in our love and our leisure
For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;
The wide hills o'er the sea-plain for them have no pleasure,
The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach.

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;
For what and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,
When all is for these but the blackness of night?

How long and for what is their patience abiding?
How oft and how oft shall their story be told,
While the hope that none seeketh in darkness is hiding
And in grief and in sorrow the world groweth old?

COME back to the inn, love, and the lights and the fire,
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
For there in a while shall be rest and desire,
And there shall the morrow's uprising be sweet.

Yet, love, as we wend the wind bloweth behind us
And beareth the last tale it telleth to-night,
How here in the spring-tide the message shall find us;
For the hope that none seeketh is coming to light.

Like the seed of midwinter, unheeded, unperished,
Like the autumn-sown wheat 'neath the snow lying green,
Like the love that o'ertook us, unawares and uncherished,
Like the babe 'neath thy girdle that groweth unseen,

So the hope of the people now buddeth and groweth—
Rest fadeth before it, and blindness and fear;
It biddeth us learn all the wisdom it knoweth;
It hath found us and held us, and biddeth us hear:

For it beareth the message: "Rise up on the morrow
And go on your ways toward the doubt and the strife;
Join hope to our hope and blend sorrow with sorrow,
And seek for men's love in the short days of life."

But lo, the old inn, and the lights and the fire,
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
Soon for us shall be quiet and rest and desire,
And to-morrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet.

II.

THE BRIDGE AND THE STREET.

IN the midst of the bridge there we stopped and we wondered
In London at last, and the moon going down,
All sullied and red where the mast-wood was sundered
By the void of the night-mist, the breath of the town.

On each side lay the City, and Thames ran between it
Dark, struggling, unheard 'neath the wheels and the feet.
A strange dream it was that we ever had seen it,
And strange was the hope we had wandered to meet.

Was all nought but confusion? What man and what master
Had each of these people that hastened along?
Like a flood flowed the faces, and faster and faster
Went the drift of the feet of the hurrying throng.

Till all these seemed but one thing, and we twain another,
A thing frail and feeble and young and unknown;
What sign 'mid all these to tell foeman from brother?
What sign of the hope in our hearts that had grown?

WE went to our lodging afar from the river,
And slept and forgot—and remembered in dreams;
And friends that I knew not I strove to deliver
From a crowd that swept o'er us in measureless streams,

Wending whither I knew not: till meseemed I was waking
To the first night in London, and lay by my love,
And she worn and changed, and my very heart aching
With a terror of soul that forbade me to move.

Till I woke, in good sooth, and she lay there beside me,
Fresh, lovely in sleep; but awhile yet I lay,
For the fear of the dream-tide yet seemed to abide me
In the cold and sad time ere the dawn of the day.

Then I went to the window, and saw down below me
The market-wains wending adown the dim street,
And the scent of the hay and the herbs seemed to know me,
And seek out my heart the dawn's sorrow to meet.

They passed, and day grew, and with pitiless faces
The dull houses stared on the prey they had trapped;
Twas as though they had slain all the fair morning places
Where in love and in leisure our joyance had happed.

My heart sank; I murmured, "What's this we are doing
In this grim net of London, this prison built stark
With the greed of the ages, our young lives pursuing
A phantom that leads but to death in the dark?"

Day grew, and no longer was dusk with it striving,
And now here and there a few people went by.
As an image of what was once eager and living
Seemed the hope that had led us to live or to die.

Yet nought else seemed happy; the past and its pleasure
Was light, and unworthy, had been and was gone;
If hope had deceived us, if hid were its treasure,
Nought now would be left us of all life had won.

O LOVE, stand beside me; the sun is uprisen
On the first day of London; and shame hath been here.
For I saw our new life like the bars of a prison,
And hope grew a-cold, and I parleyed with fear.

Ah! I sadden thy face, and thy grey eyes are chiding!
Yea, but life is no longer as stories of yore;
From us from henceforth no fair words shall be hiding
The nights of the wretched, the days of the poor.

Time was we have grieved, we have feared, we have faltered,
For ourselves, for each other, while yet we were twain;
And no whit of the world by our sorrow was altered,
Our faintness grieved nothing, our fear was in vain.

Now our fear and our faintness, our sorrow, our passion,
We shall feel all henceforth as we felt it erewhile;
But now from all this the due deeds we shall fashion
Of the eyes without blindness, the heart without guile.

Let us grieve then—and help every soul in our sorrow;
Let us fear—and press forward where few dare to go;
Let us falter in hope—and plan deeds for the morrow,
The world crowned with freedom, the fall of the foe.

As the soldier who goes from his homestead a-weeping,
And whose mouth yet remembers his sweetheart's embrace,
While all round about him the bullets are sweeping,
But stern and stout-hearted dies there in his place;

Yea, so let our lives be! e'en such that hereafter,
When the battle is won and the story is told,
Our pain shall be hid, and remembered our laughter,
And our names shall be those of the bright and the bold.

III.

SENDING TO THE WAR.

IT was down in our far-off village that we heard of the war begun,
But none of the neighbours were in it save the squire's thick-lipped son,
A youth and a fool and a captain, who came and went away,
And left me glad of his going. There was little for us to say
Of the war and its why and wherefore—and we said it often enough;
The papers gave us our wisdom, and we used it up in the rough.
But I held my peace and wondered; for I thought of the folly of men,
The fair lives ruined and broken that ne'er could be mended again;
And the tale by lies bewildered, and no cause for a man to choose;
Nothing to curse or to bless—just a game to win or to lose.

But here were the streets of London—strife stalking wide in the world;
And the flag of an ancient people to the battle-breeze unfurled.
And who was helping or heeding? The gaudy shops displayed
The toys of rich men's folly, by blinded labour made;
And still from naught to nothing the bright-skinned horses drew
Dull men and sleek-faced women with never a deed to do;
While all about and around them the street-flood ebbed and flowed,
Worn feet, grey anxious faces, grey backs bowed 'neath the load.
Lo the sons of an ancient people! And for this they fought and fell
In the days by fame made glorious, in the tale that singers tell.

We two we stood in the street in the midst of a mighty crowd,

The sound of its mingled murmur in the heavens above was loud,
And earth was foul with its squalor—that stream of every day,
The hurrying feet of labour, the faces worn and grey,
Were a sore and grievous sight, and enough and to spare had I seen
Of hard and pinching want midst our quiet fields and green;
But all was nothing to this, the London holiday throng.
Dull and with hang-dog gait they stood or shuffled along,
While the stench from the lairs they had lain in last night went up
in the wind,
And poisoned the sun-lit spring: no story men can find
Is fit for the tale of their lives; no word that man hath made
Can tell the hue of their faces, or their rags by filth o'er-laid:
For this hath our age invented—these are the sons of the free,
Who shall bear our name triumphant o'er every land and sea.
Read ye their souls in their faces, and what shall help you there?
Joyless, hopeless, shameless, angerless, set is their stare:
This is the thing we have made, and what shall help us now,
For the field hath been laboured and tilled and the teeth of the dragon
shall grow.

But why are they gathered together? what is this crowd in the street?
This is a holiday morning, though here and there we meet
The hurrying tradesman's broadcloth, or the workman's basket of tools.
Men say that at last we are rending the snares of knaves and fools;
That a cry from the heart of the nation against the foe is hurled,
And the flag of an ancient people to the battle-breeze unfurled.
The soldiers are off to the war, we are here to see the sight,
And all our griefs shall be hidden by the thought of our country's might.
'Tis the ordered anger of England and her hope for the good of the Earth
That we to-day are speeding, and many a gift of worth
Shall follow the brand and the bullet, and our wrath shall be no curse,
But a blessing of life to the helpless—unless we are liars and worse—
And these that we see are the senders; these are they that speed
The dread and the blessing of England to help the world at its need.

Sick unto death was my hope, and I turned and looked on my dear,
And beheld her frightened wonder, and her grief without a tear,

And knew how her thought was mine—when, hark! o'er the hubbub and noise,
Faint and a long way off, the music's measured voice,
And the crowd was swaying and swaying, and somehow, I knew not why,
A dream came into my heart of deliverance drawing anigh.
Then with roll and thunder of drums grew the music louder and loud,
And the whole street tumbled and surged, and cleft was the holiday crowd,
Till two walls of faces and rags lined either side of the way.
Then clamour of shouts rose upward, as bright and glittering gay
Came the voiceful brass of the band, and my heart beat fast and fast,
For the river of steel came on, and the wrath of England passed
Through the want and the woe of the town, and strange and wild was my thought,
And my clenched hands wandered about as though a weapon they sought.

Hubbub and din was behind them, and the shuffling haggard throng,
Wandering aimless about, tangled the street for long;
But the shouts and the rhythmic noise we still heard far away,
And my dream was become a picture of the deeds of another day.
Far and far was I borne, away o'er the years to come,
And again was the ordered march, and the thunder of the drum,
And the bickering points of steel, and the horses shifting about
'Neath the flashing swords of the captains—then the silence after the shout—
Sun and wind in the street, familiar things made clear,
Made strange by the breathless waiting for the deeds that are drawing anear.
For woe had grown into will, and wrath was bared of its sheath,
And stark in the streets of London stood the crop of the dragon's teeth.
Where then in my dream were the poor and the wall of faces wan?
Here and here by my side, shoulder to shoulder of man,
Hope in the simple folk, hope in the hearts of the wise,
For the happy life to follow, or death and the ending of lies,
Hope is awake in the faces angerless now no more,
Till the new peace dawn on the world, the fruit of the people's war.

War in the world abroad a thousand leagues away,

While custom's wheel goes round and day devoureth day.
Peace at home!—what peace, while the rich man's mill is strife,
And the poor is the grist that he grindeth, and life devoureth life?

IV.
MOTHER AND SON.

NOW sleeps the land of houses, and dead night holds the street,
And there thou liest, my baby, and sleepest soft and sweet;
My man is away for awhile, but safe and alone we lie;
And none heareth thy breath but thy mother, and the moon looking down from the sky
On the weary waste of the town, as it looked on the grass-edged road
Still warm with yesterday's sun, when I left my old abode,
Hand in hand with my love, that night of all nights in the year;
When the river of love o'erflowed and drowned all doubt and fear,
And we two were alone in the world, and once, if never again,
We knew of the secret of earth and the tale of its labour and pain.

Lo amidst London I lift thee, and how little and light thou art,
And thou without hope or fear, thou fear and hope of my heart!
Lo here thy body beginning, O son, and thy soul and thy life;
But how will it be if thou livest, and enterest into the strife,
And in love we dwell together when the man is grown in thee,
When thy sweet speech I shall hearken, and yet 'twixt thee and me
Shall rise that wall of distance, that round each one doth grow,
And maketh it hard and bitter each other's thought to know?

Now, therefore, while yet thou art little & hast no thought of thine own,
I will tell thee a word of the world, of the hope whence thou hast grown,
Of the love that once begat thee, of the sorrow that hath made
Thy little heart of hunger, and thy hands on my bosom laid.
Then mayst thou remember hereafter, as whiles when people say
All this hath happened before in the life of another day;
So mayst thou dimly remember this tale of thy mother's voice,
As oft in the calm of dawning I have heard the birds rejoice,

As oft I have heard the storm-wind go moaning through the wood,
And I knew that earth was speaking, and the mother's voice was good.

Now, to thee alone will I tell it that thy mother's body is fair,
In the guise of the country maidens who play with the sun and the air,
Who have stood in the row of the reapers in the August afternoon,
Who have sat by the frozen water in the highday of the moon,
When the lights of the Christmas feasting were dead in the house on the hill,
And the wild geese gone to the salt marsh had left the winter still.
Yea, I am fair, my firstling; if thou couldst but remember me!
The hair that thy small hand clutcheth is a goodly sight to see;
I am true, but my face is a snare; soft and deep are my eyes,
And they seem for men's beguiling fulfilled with the dreams of the wise.
Kind are my lips, and they look as though my soul had learned
Deep things I have never heard of. My face and my hands are burned
By the lovely sun of the acres; three months of London-town
And thy birth-bed have bleached them indeed—"But lo, where the edge of the gown"
(So said thy father) "is parting the wrist that is white as the curd
From the brown of the hands that I love, bright as the wing of a bird."

Such is thy mother, O firstling, yet strong as the maidens of old,
Whose spears and whose swords were the warders of homestead, of field and of fold.
Oft were my feet on the highway, often they wearied the grass;
From dusk unto dusk of the summer three times in a week would I pass
To the downs from the house on the river through the waves of the blossoming corn.
Fair then I lay down in the even, and fresh I arose on the morn,
And scarce in the noon was I weary. Ah son, in the days of thy strife,
If thy soul could harbour a dream of the blossom of my life!
It would be as sunlit meadows beheld from a tossing sea,
And thy soul should look on a vision of the peace that is to be.

Yet, yet the tears on my cheek! And what is this doth move
My heart to thy heart, beloved, save the flood of yearning love?

For fair and fierce is thy father, and soft and strange are his eyes
That look on the days that shall be with the hope of the brave and the wise.
It was many a day that we laughed as over the meadows we walked,
And many a day I hearkened and the pictures came as he talked;
It was many a day that we longed, and we lingered late at eve
Ere speech from speech was sundered, and my hand his hand could leave.
Then I wept when I was alone, and I longed till the daylight came;
And down the stairs I stole, and there was our housekeeping dame
(No mother of me, the foundling) kindling the fire betimes
Ere the haymaking folk went forth to the meadows down by the limes;
All things I saw at a glance; the quickening fire-tongues leapt
Through the crackling heap of sticks, and the sweet smoke up from it crept,
And close to the very hearth the low sun flooded the floor,
And the cat and her kittens played in the sun by the open door.
The garden was fair in the morning, and there in the road he stood
Beyond the crimson daisies and the bush of southernwood.
Then side by side together through the grey-walled place we went,
And O the fear departed, and the rest and sweet content!

SON, sorrow and wisdom he taught me, and sore I grieved and learned
As we twain grew into one; and the heart within me burned
With the very hopes of his heart. Ah, son, it is piteous,
But never again in my life shall I dare to speak to thee thus;
So may these lonely words about thee creep and cling,
These words of the lonely night in the days of our wayfaring.
Many a child of woman to-night is born in the town,
The desert of folly and wrong; and of what and whence are they grown?
Many and many an one of wont and use is born;
For a husband is taken to bed as a hat or a ribbon is worn.
Prudence begets her thousands: "Good is a housekeeper's life,
So shall I sell my body that I may be matron and wife."
"And I shall endure foul wedlock and bear the children of need."
Some are there born of hate—many the children of greed.
"I, I too can be wedded, though thou my love hast got."

"I am fair and hard of heart, and riches shall be my lot."
And all these are the good and the happy, on whom the world dawns fair.
O son, when wilt thou learn of those that are born of despair,
As the fabled mud of the Nile that quickens under the sun
With a growth of creeping things, half dead when just begun?
E'en such is the care of Nature that man should never die,
Though she breed of the fools of the earth, and the dregs of the city sty.
But thou, O son, O son, of very love wert born,
When our hope fulfilled bred hope, and fear was a folly outworn;
On the eve of the toil and the battle all sorrow and grief we weighed,
We hoped and we were not ashamed, we knew and we were not afraid.

Now waneth the night and the moon—ah, son, it is piteous
That never again in my life shall I dare to speak to thee thus.
But sure from the wise and the simple shall the mighty come to birth;
And fair were my fate, beloved, if I be yet on the earth
When the world is awaken at last, and from mouth to mouth they tell
Of thy love and thy deeds and thy valour, and thy hope that nought can quell.

V.

NEW BIRTH.

IT was twenty-five years ago that I lay in my mother's lap
New born to life, nor knowing one whit of all that should hap:
That day was I won from nothing to the world of struggle and pain,
Twenty-five years ago—and to-night am I born again.

I look and behold the days of the years that are passed away,
And my soul is full of their wealth, for oft were they blithe and gay
As the hours of bird and of beast: they have made me calm and strong
To wade the stream of confusion, the river of grief and wrong.

A rich man was my father, but he skulked ere I was born,
And gave my mother money, but left her life to scorn;
And we dwelt alone in our village: I knew not my mother's "shame,"

But her love and her wisdom I knew till death and the parting came.
Then a lawyer paid me money, and I lived awhile at a school,
And learned the lore of the ancients, and how the knave and the fool
Have been mostly the masters of earth: yet the earth seemed fair and good
With the wealth of field and homestead, and garden and river and wood;
And I was glad amidst it, and little of evil I knew
As I did in sport and pastime such deeds as a youth might do,
Who deems he shall live for ever. Till at last it befel on a day
That I came across our Frenchman at the edge of the new mown hay,
A-fishing as he was wont, alone as he always was;
So I helped the dark old man to bring a chub to grass,
And somehow he knew of my birth, and somehow we came to be friends,
Till he got to telling me chapters of the tale that never ends;
The battle of grief and hope with riches and folly and wrong.
He told how the weak conspire, he told of the fear of the strong;
He told of dreams grown deeds, deeds done ere time was ripe,
Of hope that melted in air like the smoke of his evening pipe;
Of the fight long after hope in the teeth of all despair;
Of battle and prison and death, of life stripped naked and bare.
But to me it all seemed happy, for I gilded all with the gold
Of youth that believes not in death, nor knoweth of hope grown cold.
I hearkened and learned, and longed with a longing that had no name,
Till I went my ways to our village and again departure came.

Wide now the world was grown, and I saw things clear and grim,
That awhile agone smiled on me from the dream-mist doubtful and dim.
I knew that the poor were poor, and had no heart or hope;
And I knew that I was nothing with the least of evils to cope;
So I thought the thoughts of a man, and I fell into bitter mood,
Wherein, except as a picture, there was nought on the earth that was good;
Till I met the woman I love, and she asked, as folk ask of the wise,
Of the root and meaning of things that she saw in the world of lies.
I told her all I knew, and the tale told lifted the load
That made me less than a man; and she set my feet on the road.

So we left our pleasure behind to seek for hope and for life,
And to London we came, if perchance there smouldered the embers of strife

Such as our Frenchman had told of; and I wrote to him to ask
If he would be our master, and set the learners their task.
But "dead" was the word on the letter when it came back to me,
And all that we saw henceforward with our own eyes must we see.
So we looked and wondered and sickened; not for ourselves indeed:
My father by now had died, but he left enough for my need;
And besides, away in our village the joiner's craft had I learned,
And I worked as other men work, and money and wisdom I earned.
Yet little from day to day in street or workshop I met
To nourish the plant of hope that deep in my heart had been set.
The life of the poor we learned, and to me there was nothing new
In their day of little deeds that ever deathward drew.
But new was the horror of London that went on all the while
That rich men played at their ease for name and fame to beguile
The days of their empty lives, and praised the deeds they did,
As though they had fashioned the earth and found out the sun long hid;
Though some of them busied themselves from hopeless day to day
With the lives of the slaves of the rich and the hell wherein they lay.
They wrought meseems as those who should make a bargain with hell,
That it grow a little cooler, and thus for ever to dwell.

So passed the world on its ways, and weary with waiting we were.
Men ate and drank and married; no wild cry smote the air,
No great crowd ran together to greet the day of doom;
And ever more and more seemed the town like a monstrous tomb
To us, the Pilgrims of Hope, until to-night it came,
And Hope on the stones of the street is written in letters of flame.

This is how it befel: a workmate of mine had heard
Some bitter speech in my mouth, and he took me up at the word,
And said: "Come over to-morrow to our Radical spouting-place;
For there, if we hear nothing new, at least we shall see a new face;
He is one of those Communist chaps, and 'tis like that you two may agree."
So we went, and the street was as dull and as common as aught you could see;
Dull and dirty the room. Just over the chairman's chair
Was a bust, a Quaker's face with nose cocked up in the air;

There were common prints on the wall of the heads of the party fray,
And Mazzini dark and lean amidst them gone astray.
Some thirty men we were of the kind that I knew full well,
Listless, rubbed down to the type of our easy-going hell.
My heart sank down as I entered, and wearily there I sat
While the chairman strove to end his maunder of this and of that.
And partly shy he seemed, and partly indeed ashamed
Of the grizzled man beside him as his name to us he named.
He rose, thickset and short, and dressed in shabby blue,
And even as he began it seemed as though I knew
The thing he was going to say, though I never heard it before.
He spoke, were it well, were it ill, as though a message he bore,
A word that he could not refrain from many a million of men.
Nor aught seemed the sordid room and the few that were listening then
Save the hall of the labouring earth and the world which was to be.
Bitter to many the message, but sweet indeed unto me,
Of man without a master, and earth without a strife,
And every soul rejoicing in the sweet and bitter of life:
Of peace and good-will he told, and I knew that in faith he spake,
But his words were my very thoughts, and I saw the battle awake,
And I followed from end to end; and triumph grew in my heart
As he called on each that heard him to arise and play his part
In the tale of the new-told gospel, lest as slaves they should live and die.

He ceased, and I thought the hearers would rise up with one cry,
And bid him straight enroll them; but they, they applauded indeed,
For the man was grown full eager, and had made them hearken and heed:
But they sat and made no sign, and two of the glibber kind
Stood up to jeer and to carp his fiery words to blind.
I did not listen to them, but failed not his voice to hear
When he rose to answer the carpers, striving to make more clear
That which was clear already; not overwell, I knew,
He answered the sneers and the silence, so hot and eager he grew;
But my hope full well he answered, and when he called again
On men to band together lest they live and die in vain,
In fear lest he should escape me, I rose ere the meeting was done,
And gave him my name and my faith—and I was the only one.

He smiled as he heard the jeers, and there was a shake of the hand,
He spoke like a friend long known; and lo! I was one of the band.

And now the streets seem gay and the high stars glittering bright;
And for me, I sing amongst them, for my heart is full and light.
I see the deeds to be done and the day to come on the earth,
And riches vanished away and sorrow turned to mirth;
I see the city squalor and the country stupor gone.
And we a part of it all—we twain no longer alone
In the days to come of the pleasure, in the days that are of the fight—
I was born once long ago: I am born again to-night.

VI.

THE NEW PROLETARIAN.

HOW near to the goal are we now, and what shall we live to behold?
Will it come a day of surprise to the best of the hopeful and bold?
Shall the sun arise some morning and see men falling to work,
Smiling and loving their lives, not fearing the ill that may lurk
In every house on their road, in the very ground that they tread?
Shall the sun see famine slain, and the fear of children dead?
Shall he look adown on men set free from the burden of care,
And the earth grown like to himself, so comely, clean and fair?
Or else will it linger and loiter, till hope deferred hath spoiled
All bloom of the life of man—yea, the day for which we have toiled?
Till our hearts be turned to stone by the griefs that we have borne,
And our loving kindness seared by love from our anguish torn.
Till our hope grow a wrathful fire, and the light of the second birth
Be a flame to burn up the weeds from the lean impoverished earth.

What's this? Meseems it was but a little while ago
When the merest sparkle of hope set all my heart aglow!
The hope of the day was enough; but now 'tis the very day
That wearies my hope with longing. What's changed or gone away?
Or what is it drags at my heart-strings?—is it aught save the coward's fear?
In this little room where I sit is all that I hold most dear—

My love, and the love we have fashioned, my wife and the little lad.
Yet the four walls look upon us with other eyes than they had,
For indeed a thing hath happened. Last week at my craft I worked,
Lest oft in the grey of the morning my heart should tell me I shirked;
But to-day I work for us three, lest he and she and I
In the mud of the street should draggle till we come to the workhouse
or die.

Not long to tell is the story, for, as I told you before,
A lawyer paid me the money which came from my father's store.
Well, now the lawyer is dead, and a curious tangle of theft,
It seems, is what he has lived by, and none of my money is left.
So I who have worked for my pleasure now work for utter need:
In "the noble army of labour" I now am a soldier indeed.

"You are young, you belong to the class that you love," saith the rich
man's sneer;
"Work on with your class and be thankful." All that I hearken to hear,
Nor heed the laughter much; have patience a little while,
I will tell you what's in my heart, nor hide a jot by guile.
When I worked pretty much for my pleasure I really worked with a will,
It was well and workmanlike done, and my fellows knew my skill,
And deemed me one of themselves though they called me gentleman Dick,
Since they knew I had some money; but now that to work I must stick,
Or fall into utter ruin, there's something gone, I find;
The work goes, cleared is the job, but there's something left behind;
I take up fear with my chisel, fear lies 'twixt me and my plane,
And I wake in the merry morning to a new unwonted pain.
That's fear: I shall live it down—and many a thing besides
Till I win the poor dulled heart which the workman's jacket hides.
Were it not for the Hope of Hopes I know my journey's end,
And would wish I had ne'er been born the weary way to wend.

Now further, well you may think we have lived no gentleman's life,
My wife is my servant, and I am the servant of my wife,
And we make no work for each other; but country folk we were,
And she sickened sore for the grass and the breath of the fragrant air

That had made her lovely and strong; and so up here we came
To the northern slopes of the town to live with a country dame,
Who can talk of the field-folks' ways: not one of the newest the house,
The woodwork worn to the bone, its panels the land of the mouse,
Its windows rattling and loose, its floors all up and down;
But this at least it was, just a cottage left in the town.
There might you sit in our parlour in the Sunday afternoon
And watch the sun through the vine-leaves and fall to dreaming that soon
You would see the grey team passing, their fetlocks wet with the brook,
Or the shining mountainous straw-load: there the summer moon would look
Through the leaves on the lampless room, wherein we sat we twain,
All London vanished away; and the morn of the summer rain
Would waft us the scent of the hay; or the first faint yellow leaves
Would flutter adown before us and tell of the acres of sheaves.

All this hath our lawyer eaten, and to-morrow must we go
To a room near my master's shop, in the purlieus of Soho.
No words of its shabby meanness! But that is our prison-cell
In the jail of weary London. Therein for us must dwell
The hope of the world that shall be, that rose a glimmering spark
As the last thin flame of our pleasure sank quavering in the dark.

Again the rich man jeereth: "The man is a coward, or worse—
He bewails his feeble pleasure; he quails before the curse
Which many a man endureth with calm and smiling face."
Nay, the man is a man, by your leave! Or put yourself in his place,
And see if the tale reads better. The haven of rest destroyed,
And nothing left of the life that was once so well enjoyed
But leave to live and labour, and the glimmer of hope deferred.
Now know I the cry of the poor no more as a story heard,
But rather a wordless wail forced forth from the weary heart.
Now, now when hope ariseth I shall surely know my part.

THERE'S a little more to tell. When those last words were said,
At least I was yet a-working, and earning daily bread.
But now all that is changed, and meseems adown the stair
That leads to the nethermost pit, man, wife and child must fare.

When I joined the Communist folk, I did what in me lay
To learn the grounds of their faith. I read day after day
Whatever books I could handle, and heard about and about
What talk was going amongst them; and I burned up doubt after doubt,
Until it befel at last that to others I needs must speak
(Indeed, they pressed me to that while yet I was weaker than weak).
So I began the business, and in street-corners I spake
To knots of men. Indeed, that made my very heart ache,
So hopeless it seemed; for some stood by like men of wood;
And some, though fain to listen, but a few words understood;
And some but hooted and jeered: but whiles across some I came
Who were keen and eager to hear; as in dry flax the flame
So the quick thought flickered amongst them: and that indeed was a feast.
So about the streets I went, and the work on my hands increased;
And to say the very truth betwixt the smooth and the rough
It was work and hope went with it, and I liked it well enough:
Nor made I any secret of all that I was at
But daily talked in our shop and spoke of this and of that.
Then vanished my money away, and like a fool I told
Some one or two of the loss. Did that make the master bold?
Before I was one of his lot, and as queer as my head might be
I might do pretty much as I liked. Well now he sent for me
And spoke out in very words my thought of the rich man's jeer:
"Well sir, you have got your wish, as far as I can hear,
And are now no thief of labour, but an honest working man:
Now I'll give you a word of warning: stay in it as long as you can,
This working lot that you like so: you're pretty well off as you are.
So take another warning: I have thought you went too far,
And now I am quite sure of it; so make an end of your talk
At once and for ever henceforth, or out of my shop you walk;
There are plenty of men to be had who are quite as good as you.

And mind you, anywhere else you'll scarce get work to do,
Unless you rule your tongue;—good morning; stick to your work."

The hot blood rose to my eyes, somewhere a thought did lurk
To finish both him and the job: but I knew now what I was,
And out of the little office in helpless rage did I pass
And went to my work, a *slave*, for the sake of my child and my sweet.
Did men look for the brand on my forehead that eve as I went through the
street?
And what was the end after all? Why, one of my shopmates heard
My next night's speech in the street, and passed on some bitter word,
And that week came a word with my money: "You needn't come again."
And the shame of my four days' silence had been but grief in vain.

Well I see the days before me: this time we shall not die
Nor go to the workhouse at once: I shall get work by-and-by,
And shall work in fear at first, and at last forget my fear,
And drudge on from day to day, since it seems that I hold life dear.

'Tis the lot of many millions! Yet if half of those millions knew
The hope that my heart hath learned, we should find a deed to do,
And who or what should withstand us? And I, e'en I might live
To know the love of my fellows and the gifts that earth can give.

VII.

IN PRISON—AND AT HOME.

THE first of the nights is this, and I cannot go to bed;
I long for the dawning sorely, although when the night shall be
dead,
Scarce to me shall the day be alive. Twice twenty-eight nights more,
Twice twenty-eight long days till the evil dream be o'er!
And he, does he count the hours as he lies in his prison-cell?
Does he nurse and cherish his pain? Nay, I know his strong heart well,
Swift shall his soul fare forth; he is here, and bears me away,
Till hand in hand we depart toward the hope of the earlier day.

Yea, here or there he sees it: in the street, in the cell, he sees
The vision he made me behold mid the stems of the blossoming trees,
When spring lay light on the earth, and first and at last I knew
How sweet was his clinging hand, how fair were the deeds he would do.

Nay, how wilt thou weep and be soft and cherish a pleasure in pain,
When the days and their task are before thee and awhile thou must work
for twain?
O face, thou shalt lose yet more of thy fairness, be thinner no doubt,
And be waxen white and worn by the day that he cometh out!
Hand, how pale thou shalt be! how changed from the sunburnt hand
That he kissed as it handled the rake in the noon of the summer land!

Let me think then it is but a trifle: the neighbours have told me so;
"Two months! why that is nothing and the time will speedily go."
'Tis nothing—O empty bed, let me work then for his sake!
I will copy out the paper which he thought the News might take,
If my eyes may see the letters; 'tis a picture of our life
And the little deeds of our days ere we thought of prison and strife.

Yes, neighbour, yes I am early—and I was late last night;
Bedless I wore through the hours and made a shift to write.
It was kind of you to come, nor will it grieve me at all
To tell you why he's in prison and how the thing did befal;
For I know you are with us at heart, and belike will join us soon.
It was thus: we went to a meeting on Saturday afternoon,
At a new place down in the West, a wretched quarter enough,
Where the rich men's houses are elbowed by ragged streets and rough,
Which are worse than they seem to be. (Poor thing! you know too well
How pass the days and the nights within that bricken hell!)
There, then, on a bit of waste we stood 'twixt the rich and the poor;
And Jack was the first to speak; that was he that you met at the door
Last week. It was quiet at first; and dull they most of them stood
As though they heeded nothing, nor thought of bad or of good,
Not even that they were poor, and haggard and dirty and dull:
Nay, some were so rich indeed that they with liquor were full,
And dull wrath rose in their souls as the hot words went by their ears,

For they deemed they were mocked and rated by men that were more than their peers.
But for some, they seemed to think that a prelude was all this
To the preachment of saving of souls, and hell, and endless bliss;
While some (O the hearts of slaves!) although they might understand,
When they heard their masters and feeders called thieves of wealth and of land,
Were as angry as though *they* were cursed. Withal there were some that heard,
And stood and pondered it all, and garnered a hope and a word.
Ah! heavy my heart was grown as I gazed on the terrible throng.
Lo! these that should have been the glad and the deft and the strong,
How were they dull and abased as the very filth of the road!
And who should waken their souls or clear their hearts of the load?

The crowd was growing and growing, and therewith the jeering grew;
And now that the time was come for an ugly brawl I knew,
When I saw how midst of the workmen some well-dressed men there came,
Of the scum of the well-to-do, brutes void of pity or shame;
The thief is a saint beside them. These raised a jeering noise,
And our speaker quailed before it, and the hubbub drowned his voice.
Then Richard put him aside and rose at once in his place,
And over the rags and the squalor beamed out his beautiful face,
And his sweet voice rang through the tumult, and I think the crowd would have hushed
And hearkened his manly words; but a well-dressed reptile pushed
Right into the ring about us and screeched out infamies
That sickened the soul to hearken; till he caught my angry eyes
And my voice that cried out at him, and straight on me he turned,
A foul word smote my heart and his cane on my shoulders burned.
But e'en as a kestrel stoops down Richard leapt from his stool
And drave his strong right hand amidst the mouth of the fool.
Then all was mingled together, and away from him was I torn,
And, hustled hither and thither, on the surging crowd was borne;
But at last I felt my feet, for the crowd began to thin,
And I looked about for Richard that away from thence we might win;

When lo, the police amidst us, and Richard hustled along
Betwixt a pair of blue-coats as the doer of all the wrong!

Little longer, friend, is the story; I scarce have seen him again;
I could not get him bail despite my trouble and pain;
And this morning he stood in the dock: for all that that might avail,
They might just as well have dragged him at once to the destined jail.
The police had got their man and they meant to keep him there,
And whatever tale was needful they had no trouble to swear.

Well, the white-haired fool on the bench was busy it seems that day,
And so with the words "Two months," he swept the case away;
Yet he lectured my man ere he went, but not for the riot indeed
For which he was sent to prison, but for holding a dangerous creed.
"What have you got to do to preach such perilous stuff?
To take some care of yourself should find you work enough.
If you needs must preach or lecture, then hire a chapel or hall;
Though indeed if you take my advice you'll just preach nothing at all,
But stick to your work: you seem clever; who knows but you might rise,
And become a little builder should you condescend to be wise?
For in spite of your silly sedition, the land that we live in is free,
And opens a pathway to merit for you as well as for me."

Ah friend, am I grown light-headed with the lonely grief of the night,
That I babble of this babble? Woe's me, how little and light
Is this beginning of trouble to all that yet shall be borne—
At worst but as the shower that lays but a yard of the corn
Before the hailstorm cometh and flattens the field to the earth.

O for a word from my love of the hope of the second birth!
Could he clear my vision to see the sword creeping out of the sheath
Inch by inch as we writhe in the toils of our living death!
Could he but strengthen my heart to know that we cannot fail;
For alas, I am lonely here—helpless and feeble and frail;
I am e'en as the poor of the earth, e'en they that are now alive;
And where is their might and their cunning with the mighty of men to strive?

Though they that come after be strong to win the day and the crown,
Ah, ever must we the deedless to the deedless dark go down,
Still crying, "To-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow yet shall be
The new-born sun's arising o'er happy earth and sea"—
And we not there to greet it—for to-day and its life we yearn,
And where is the end of toiling and whitherward now shall we turn
But to patience, ever patience, and yet and yet to bear;
And yet, forlorn, unanswered as oft before to hear,
Through the tales of the ancient fathers and the dreams that mock our wrong,
That cry to the naked heavens, "How long, O Lord! how long?"

VIII.

THE HALF OF LIFE GONE.

THE days have slain the days, and the seasons have gone by
And brought me the summer again; and here on the grass I lie
As erst I lay and was glad ere I meddled with right & with wrong.
Wide lies the mead as of old, and the river is creeping along
By the side of the elm-clad bank that turns its weedy stream,
And grey o'er its hither lip the quivering rushes gleam.
There is work in the mead as of old; they are eager at winning the hay,
While every sun sets bright and begets a fairer day.
The forks shine white in the sun round the yellow red-wheeled wain,
Where the mountain of hay grows fast; and now from out of the lane
Comes the ox-team drawing another, comes the bailiff and the beer,
And thump, thump, goes the farmer's nag o'er the narrow bridge of the weir.
High up and light are the clouds, and though the swallows flit
So high o'er the sunlit earth, they are well a part of it,
And so, though high over them, are the wings of the wandering herne;
In measureless depths above him doth the fair sky quiver and burn;
The dear sun floods the land as the morning falls toward noon,
And a little wind is awake in the best of the latter June.

They are busy winning the hay, and the life and the picture they make,
If I were as once I was, I should deem it made for my sake;

For here if one need not work is a place for happy rest,
While one's thought wends over the world, north, south, and east and west.

There are the men and the maids, and the wives and the gaffers grey
Of the fields I know so well, and but little changed are they
Since I was a lad amongst them; and yet how great is the change!
Strange are they grown unto me; yea, I to myself am strange.
Their talk and their laughter mingling with the music of the meads
Has now no meaning to me to help or to hinder my needs,
So far from them have I drifted. And yet amidst them goes
A part of myself, my boy, and of pleasure and pain he knows,
And seems it something strange when he is other than glad.
Lo now! the woman that stoops and kisses the face of the lad,
And puts a rake in his hand and laughs in his laughing face—
Whose is the voice that laughs in the old familiar place?
Whose should it be but my love's, if my love were yet on the earth?
Could she refrain from the fields where my joy and her joy had birth,
When I was there and her child, on the grass that knew her feet
Mid the flowers that led her on when the summer eve was sweet?

No, no, it is she no longer; never again can she come
And behold the hay-wains creeping o'er the meadows of her home;
No more can she kiss her son or put the rake in his hand
That she handled a while agone in the midst of the haymaking band.
Her laughter is gone and her life; there is no such thing on the earth,
No share for me then in the stir, no share in the hurry and mirth.

Nay, let me look and believe that all these will vanish away,
At least when the night has fallen, and that she will be there mid the hay,
Happy and weary with work, waiting and longing for love.
There will she be, as of old, when the great moon hung above,
And lightless and dead was the village, & nought but the weir was awake;
There will she rise to meet me, and my hands will she hasten to take,
And thence shall we wander away, and over the ancient bridge
By many a rose-hung hedgerow, till we reach the sun-burnt ridge
And the great trench digged by the Romans: there then awhile shall we stand,

To watch the dawn come creeping o'er the fragrant lovely land,
Till all the world awaketh, and draws us down, we twain,
To the deeds of the field and the fold and the merry summer's gain.

Ah thus, only thus shall I see her, in dreams of the day or the night,
When my soul is beguiled of its sorrow to remember past delight.
She is gone. She was and she is not; there is no such thing on the earth
But e'en as a picture painted; and for me there is void and dearth
That I cannot name or measure.
Yet for me and all these she died,
E'en as she lived for awhile, that the better day might betide.
Therefore I live, and I shall live till the last day's work shall fail.
Have patience now but a little and I will tell you the tale
Of how and why she died, and why I am weak and worn,
And have wandered away to the meadows and the place where I was born:
But here and to-day I cannot; for ever my thought will stray
To that hope fulfilled for a little and the bliss of the earlier day.
Of the great world's hope and anguish to-day I scarce can think:
Like a ghost from the lives of the living and their earthly deeds I shrink.
I will go adown by the water and over the ancient bridge,
And wend in our footsteps of old till I come to the sun-burnt ridge,
And the great trench digged by the Romans; & thence awhile will I gaze,
And see three teeming counties stretch out till they fade in the haze;
And in all the dwellings of man that thence mine eyes shall see,
What man as hapless as I am beneath the sun shall be?

O fool, what words are these? Thou hast a sorrow to nurse,
And thou hast been bold and happy; but these, if they utter a curse,
No sting it has and no meaning—it is empty sound on the air.
Thy life is full of mourning, and theirs so empty and bare
That they have no words of complaining; nor so happy have they been
That they may measure sorrow or tell what grief may mean.
And thou, thou hast deeds to do, and toil to meet thee soon;
Depart and ponder on these through the sun-worn afternoon.

IX.

A NEW FRIEND.

I HAVE promised to tell you the story of how I was left alone
Sick and wounded and sore, and why the woman is gone
That I deemed a part of my life. Tell me when all is told,
If you deem it fit that the earth, that the world of men should hold
My work and my weariness still; yet think of that other life,
The child of me and of her, and the years and the coming strife.

After I came out of prison our living was hard to earn
By the work of my hands, and of hers; to shifts we had to turn,
Such as the poor know well, and the rich cannot understand,
And just out of the gutter we stood, still loving and hand in hand.

Do you ask me if still amidst all I held the hunt in view,
And the hope of the morning of life, all the things I should do and undo?
Be easy, I am not a coward: nay little prudence I learned,
I spoke and I suffered for speaking, and my meat by my manhood was burned.
When the poor man thinks—and rebels, the whip lies ready anear;
But he who is rebel and rich may live safe for many a year,
While he warms his heart with pictures of all the glory to come.
There's the storm of the press and the critics maybe, but sweet is his home,
There is meat in the morn and the even, and rest when the day is done,
All is fair and orderly there as the rising and setting sun—
And I know both the rich and the poor.
Well, I grew bitter they said;
'Tis not unlike that I did, for bitter indeed was my bread,
And surely the nursling plant shall smack of its nourishing soil.
And here was our life in short, pinching and worry and toil,
One petty fear thrust out by another come in its place,
Each scrap of life but a fear, and the sum of it wretched and base.
E'en so fare millions of men, where men for money are made,
Where the poor are dumb and deedless, where the rich are not afraid.
Ah, am I bitter again? Well, these are our breeding-stock,
The very base of order, and the state's foundation rock;

Is it so good and so safe that their manhood should be outworn
By the struggle for anxious life, the dull pain dismally borne,
Till all that was man within them is dead and vanished away?
Were it not even better that all these should think on a day
As they look on each other's sad faces, and see how many they are:
"What are these tales of old time of men who were mighty in war?
They fought for some city's dominion, for the name of a forest or field;
They fell that no alien's token should be blazoned on their shield;
And for this is their valour praised and dear is their renown,
And their names are beloved for ever and they wear the patriot's crown;
And shall we then wait in the streets and this heap of misery,
Till their stones rise up to help us or the far heavens set us free?
For we, we shall fight for no name, no blazon on banner or shield;
But that man to man may hearken and the earth her increase yield;
That never again in the world may be sights like we have seen;
That never again in the world may be men like we have been,
That never again like ours may be manhood spoilt and blurred."

Yea even so was I bitter, and this was my evilest word:
"Spend and be spent for our hope, and you at least shall be free,
Though you be rugged and coarse, as wasted and worn as you be."

Well, "bitter" I was, and denounced, and scarcely at last might we stand
From out of the very gutter, as we wended hand in hand.
I had written before for the papers, but so "bitter" was I grown,
That none of them now would have me that could pay me half-a-crown,
And the worst seemed closing around us; when as it needs must chance,
I spoke at some Radical Club of the Great Revolution in France.
Indeed I said nothing new to those who had learned it all,
And yet as something strange on some of the folk did it fall.
It was late in the terrible war, and France to the end drew nigh,
And some of us stood agape to see how the war would die,
And what would spring from its ashes. So when the talk was o'er
And after the stir and excitement I felt the burden I bore
Heavier yet for it all, there came to speak to me
A serious well-dressed man, a "gentleman," young I could see;
And we fell to talk together, and he shyly gave me praise,

And asked, though scarcely in words, of my past and my "better days."
Well, there,—I let it all out, and I flushed as I strode along,
(For we were walking by now) and bitterly spoke of the wrong.
Maybe I taught him something, but ready he was to learn,
And had come to our workmen meetings some knowledge of men to learn.
He kindled afresh at my words, although to try him I spake
More roughly than I was wont; but every word did he take
For what it was really worth, nor even laughter he spared,
As though he would look on life of its rags of habit bared.

Well, why should I be ashamed that he helped me at my need?
My wife and my child, must I kill them? And the man was a friend indeed,
And the work that he got me I did (it was writing, you understand)
As well as another might do it. To be short, he joined our band
Before many days were over, and we saw him everywhere
That we workmen met together, though I brought him not to my lair.
Eager he grew for the Cause, and we twain grew friend and friend:
He was dainty of mind and of body; most brave, as he showed in the end;
Merry despite of his sadness, quick-witted and speedy to see:
Like a perfect knight of old time as the poets would have them to be.
That was the friend that I won by my bitter speech at last.
He loved me; he grieved my soul: now the love and the grief are past;
He is gone with his eager learning, his sadness and his mirth,
His hope and his fond desire. There is no such thing on the earth.
He died not unbefriended—nor unbeloved maybe.
Betwixt my life and his longing there rolls a boundless sea.
And what are those memories now to all that I have to do,
The deeds to be done so many, the days of my life so few?

X.

READY TO DEPART.

I SAID of my friend new-found that at first he saw not my lair;
Yet he and I and my wife were together here and there;
And at last as my work increased and my den to a dwelling grew,
He came there often enough, and yet more together we drew.

Then came a change in the man; for a month he kept away,
Then came again and was with us for a fortnight every day,
But often he sat there silent, which was little his wont with us.
And at first I had no inkling of what constrained him thus;
I might have thought that he faltered, but now and again there came,
When we spoke of the Cause and its doings, a flash of his eager flame,
And he seemed himself for a while; then the brightness would fade away,
And he gloomed and shrank from my eyes.
Thus passed day after day,
And grieved I grew, and I pondered: till at last one eve we sat
In the fire-lit room together, and talked of this and that,
But chiefly indeed of the war and what would come of it;
For Paris drew near to its fall, and wild hopes 'gan to flit
Amidst us Communist folk; and we talked of what might be done
When the Germans had gone their ways and the two were left alone,
Betrayers and betrayed in war-worn wasted France.

As I spoke the word "betrayed," my eyes met his in a glance,
And swiftly he turned away; then back with a steady gaze
He turned on me; and it seemed as when a sword-point plays
Round the sword in a battle's beginning and the coming on of strife.
For I knew though he looked on me, he saw not me, but my wife:
And he reddened up to the brow, and the tumult of the blood
Nigh blinded my eyes for a while, that I scarce saw bad or good,
Till I knew that he was arisen and had gone without a word.
Then I turned about unto her, and a quivering voice I heard
Like music without a meaning, and twice I heard my name.
"O Richard, Richard!" she said, and her arms about me came,
And her tears and the lips that I loved were on my face once more.
A while I clung to her body, and longing sweet and sore
Beguiled my heart of its sorrow; then we sundered and sore she wept,
While fair pictures of days departed about my sad heart crept,
And mazed I felt and weary. But we sat apart again,
Not speaking, while between us was the sharp and bitter pain
As the sword 'twixt the lovers bewildered in the fruitless marriage bed.
Yet a while, and we spoke together, and I scarce knew what I said,
But it was not wrath or reproaching, or the chill of love-born hate;

For belike around and about us, we felt the brooding fate.
We were gentle and kind together, and if any had seen us so,
They had said, "These two are one in the face of all trouble and woe."
But indeed as a wedded couple we shrank from the eyes of men,
As we dwelt together and pondered on the days that come not again.

Days passed and we dwelt together; nor Arthur came for awhile;
Gravely it was and sadly, and with no greeting smile,
That we twain met at our meetings: but no growth of hate was yet,
Though my heart at first would be sinking as our thoughts and our eyes they met:
And when he spake amidst us and as one we two agreed,
And I knew of his faith and his wisdom, then sore was my heart indeed.
We shrank from meeting alone: for the words we had to say
Our thoughts would nowise fashion—not yet for many a day.

Unhappy days of all days! Yet O might they come again!
So sore as my longing returneth to their trouble and sorrow and pain!

But time passed, and once we were sitting, my wife and I in our room,
And it was in the London twilight and the February gloom,
When there came a knock, and he entered all pale, though bright were his eyes,
And I knew that something had happened, and my heart to my mouth did arise.
"It is over," he said "—and beginning; for Paris has fallen at last,
And who knows what next shall happen after all that has happened and passed?
There now may we all be wanted."
I took up the word: "Well then
Let us go, we three together, and there to die like men."

"Nay," he said, "to live and be happy like men." Then he flushed up red,
And she no less as she hearkened, as one thought through their bodies had sped.
Then I reached out my hand unto him, and I kissed her once on the brow,
But no word craving forgiveness, and no word of pardon e'en now,

Our minds for our mouths might fashion.
In the February gloom
And into the dark we sat planning, and there was I in the room,
And in speech I gave and I took; but yet alone and apart
In the fields where I once was a youngling whiles wandered the thoughts of my heart,
And whiles in the unseen Paris, and the streets made ready for war.
Night grew and we lit the candles, and we drew together more,
And whiles we differed a little as we settled what to do,
And my soul was cleared of confusion as nigher the deed-time drew.

Well, I took my child into the country, as we had settled there,
And gave him o'er to be cherished by a kindly woman's care,
A friend of my mother's, but younger: and for Arthur, I let him give
His money, as mine was but little, that the boy might flourish and live,
Lest we three, or I and Arthur, should perish in tumult and war,
And at least the face of his father he should look on never more.
You cry out shame on my honour? But yet remember again
That a man in my boy was growing; must my passing pride and pain
Undo the manhood within him and his days and their doings blight?
So I thrust my pride away, and I did what I deemed was right,
And left him down in our country.
And well may you think indeed
How my sad heart swelled at departing from the peace of river and mead,
But I held all sternly aback and again to the town did I pass.
And as alone I journeyed, this was ever in my heart:
"They may die; they may live and be happy; but for me I know my part,
In Paris to do my utmost, and there in Paris to die!"
And I said, "The day of the deeds and the day of deliverance is nigh."

XI.

A GLIMPSE OF THE COMING DAY.

IT was strange indeed, that journey! Never yet had I crossed the sea
Or looked on another people than the folk that had fostered me,
And my heart rose up and fluttered as in the misty night
We came on the fleet of the fishers slow rolling in the light

Of the hidden moon, as the sea dim under the false dawn lay;
And so like shadows of ships through the night they faded away,
And Calais pier was upon us. Dreamlike it was indeed
As we sat in the train together, and toward the end made speed.
But a dull sleep came upon me, and through the sleep a dream
Of the Frenchman who once was my master by the side of the willowy stream;
And he talked and told me tales of the war unwaged as yet,
And the victory never won, and bade me never forget,
While I walked on, still unhappy, by the home of the dark-striped perch.
Till at last, with a flash of light and a rattle and side-long lurch,
I woke up dazed and witless, till my sorrow awoke again,
And the grey of the morn was upon us as we sped through the poplar plain,
By the brimming streams and the houses with their grey roofs warped and bent,
And the horseless plough in the furrow, and things fair and innocent.
And there sat my wife before me, and she, too, dreamed as she slept;
For the slow tears fell from her eyelids as in her sleep she wept.
But Arthur sat by my side and waked; and flushed was his face,
And his eyes were quick to behold the picture of each fair place
That we flashed by as on we hurried; and I knew that the joy of life
Was strongly stirred within him by the thought of the coming strife.
Then I too thought for a little, It is good in grief's despite,
It is good to see earth's pictures, and so live in the day and the light.
Yea, we deemed that to death we were hastening, and it made our vision clear,
And we knew the delight of our life-days, and held their sorrow dear.

But now when we came unto Paris and were out in the sun and the street,
It was strange to see the faces that our wondering eyes did meet;
Such joy and peace and pleasure! That folk were glad we knew,
But knew not the why and the wherefore; and we who had just come through
The vanquished land and down-cast, and there at St. Denis e'en now
Had seen the German soldiers, and heard their bugles blow,
And the drum and fife go rattling through the freshness of the morn—

Yet here we beheld all joyous the folk they had made forlorn!
So at last from a grey stone building we saw a great flag fly,
One colour, red and solemn 'gainst the blue of the spring-tide sky,
And we stopped and turned to each other, and as each at each did we gaze,
The city's hope enwrapped us with joy and great amaze.

As folk in a dream we washed and we ate, and in all detail,
Oft told and in many a fashion, did we have all yesterday's tale:
How while we were threading our tangle of trouble in London there,
And I for my part, let me say it, within but a step of despair,
In Paris the day of days had betid; for the vile dwarf's stroke,
To madden Paris and crush her, had been struck and the dull sword broke;
There was now no foe and no fool in the city, and Paris was free;
And e'en as she is this morning, to-morrow all France will be.

We heard, and our hearts were saying, "In a little while all the earth—"
And that day at last of all days I knew what life was worth;
For I saw what few have beheld, a folk with all hearts gay.
Then at last I knew indeed that our word of the coming day,
That so oft in grief and in sorrow I had preached, and scarcely knew
If it was but despair of the present or the hope of the day that was due—
I say that I saw it now, real, solid and at hand.

And strange how my heart went back to our little nook of the land,
And how plain and clear I saw it, as though I longed indeed
To give it a share of the joy and the satisfaction of need
That here in the folk I beheld. For this in our country spring
Did the starlings bechatter the gables, and the thrush in the thorn-bush sing,
And the green cloud spread o'er the willows, and the little children rejoice
And shout midst a nameless longing to the morning's mingled voice;
For this was the promise of spring-tide, & the new leaves longing to burst,
And the white roads threading the acres, and the sun-warmed meadows athirst.
Once all was the work of sorrow and the life without reward,
And the toil that fear hath bidden, and the folly of master and lord;

But now are all things changing, and hope without a fear
Shall speed us on through the story of the changes of the year.
Now spring shall pluck the garland that summer weaves for all,
And autumn spread the banquet and winter fill the hall.
O earth, thou kind bestower, thou ancient fruitful place,
How lovely and beloved now gleams thy happy face!

And O mother, mother, I said, hadst thou known as I lay in thy lap,
And for me thou hopedst and fearedst, on what days my life should hap,
Hadst thou known of the death that I look for, and the deeds wherein I should deal,
How calm had been thy gladness! How sweet hadst thou smiled on my weal!
As some woman of old hadst thou wondered, who hath brought forth a god of the earth,
And in joy that knoweth no speech she dreams of the happy birth.

Yea, fair were those hours indeed, whatever hereafter might come,
And they swept over all my sorrow, and all thought of my wildered home.
But not for dreams of rejoicing had we come across the sea:
That day we delivered the letters that our friends had given to me,
And we craved for some work for the cause. And what work was there indeed,
But to learn the business of battle and the manner of dying at need?
We three could think of none other, and we wrought our best therein;
And both of us made a shift the sergeant's stripes to win,
For diligent were we indeed: and he, as in all he did,
Showed a cheerful ready talent that nowise might be hid,
And yet hurt the pride of no man that he needs must step before.
But as for my wife, the *brancard* of the ambulance-women she wore,
And gently and bravely would serve us; and to all as a sister to be—
A sister amidst of the strangers—and, alas! a sister to me.

XII.

MEETING THE WAR-MACHINE.

SO we dwelt in the war-girdled city as a very part of its life.
Looking back at it all from England, I an atom of the strife,
I can see that I might have seen what the end would be from the first,
The hope of man devoured in the day when the Gods are athirst.
But those days we lived, as I tell you, a life that was not our own;
And we saw but the hope of the world, and the seed that the ages had sown
Spring up now a fair-blossomed tree from the earth lying over the dead;
Earth quickened, earth kindled to spring-tide with the blood that her lovers have shed,
With the happy days cast off for the sake of her happy day,
With the love of women foregone, and the bright youth worn away,
With the gentleness stripped from the lives thrust into the jostle of war,
With the hope of the hardy heart forever dwindling afar.

O Earth, Earth, look on thy lovers, who knew all thy gifts and thy gain,
But cast them aside for thy sake, and caught up barren pain!
Indeed of some art thou mindful, and ne'er shalt forget their tale,
Till shrunk are the floods of thine ocean and thy sun is waxen pale.
But rather I bid thee remember e'en these of the latter days,
Who were fed by no fair promise and made drunken by no praise.
For them no opening heaven reached out the martyr's crown;
No folk delivered wept them, and no harvest of renown
They reaped with the scythe of battle; nor round their dying bed
Did kindly friendly farewell the dew of blessing shed;
In the sordid streets of the city mid a folk that knew them not,
In the living death of the prison didst thou deal them out their lot,
Yet foundest them deeds to be doing; and no feeble folk were they
To scowl on their own undoing and wail their lives away;
But oft were they blithe and merry and deft from the strife to wring
Some joy that others gained not midst their peaceful wayfaring.
So fared they, giftless ever, and no help of fortune sought.
Their life was thy deliverance, O Earth, and for thee they fought;
Mid the jeers of the happy and deedless, mid failing friends they went
To their foredoomed fruitful ending on the love of thee intent.

Yea and we were a part of it all, the beginning of the end,
That first fight of the uttermost battle whither all the nations wend;
And yet could I tell you its story, you might think it little and mean.
For few of you now will be thinking of the day that might have been,
And fewer still meseemeth of the day that yet shall be,
That shall light up that first beginning and its tangled misery.
For indeed a very machine is the war that now men wage;
Nor have we hold of its handle, we gulled of our heritage,
We workmen slaves of machines. Well, it ground us small enough
This machine of the beaten Bourgeois; though oft the work was rough
That it turned out for its money. Like other young soldiers at first
I scarcely knew the wherefore why our side had had the worst;
For man to man and in knots we faced the matter well;
And I thought, well to-morrow or next day a new tale will be to tell.
I was fierce and not afraid; yet O were the wood-sides fair,
And the crofts and the sunny gardens, though death they harboured there!
And few but fools are fain of leaving the world outright,
And the story over and done, and an end of the life and the light.
No hatred of life, thou knowest O Earth, mid the bullets I bore,
Though pain and grief oppressed me that I never may suffer more.
But in those days past over did life and death seem one;
Yea the life had we attained to which could never be undone.

You would have me tell of the fighting? Well, you know it was new to me
Yet it soon seemed as if it had been for ever, and ever would be.
The morn when we made that sally, some thought (and yet not I)
That a few days and all would be over: just a few had got to die,
And the rest would be happy thenceforward. But my stubborn country
blood
Was bidding me hold my halloo till we were out of the wood.
And that was the reason perhaps why little disheartened I was,
As we stood all huddled together that night in a helpless mass,
As beaten men are wont: and I knew enough of war
To know midst its unskilled labour what slips full often are.

There was Arthur unhurt beside me, and my wife come back again,
And surely that eve between us there was love though no lack of pain

As we talked all the matter over, and our hearts spake more than our lips;
And we said, "We shall learn, we shall learn—yea, e'en from disasters and slips."

Well, many a thing we learned, but we learned not how to prevail
O'er the brutal war-machine, the ruthless grinder of bale;
By the bourgeois world it was made, for the bourgeois world; and we,
We were e'en as the village weaver 'gainst the power-loom, maybe.
It drew on nearer and nearer, and we 'gan to look to the end—
We three, at least—and our lives began with death to blend;
Though we were long a-dying—though I dwell on yet as a ghost
In the land where we once were happy, to look on the loved and the lost.

XIII.
THE STORY'S ENDING.

HOW can I tell you the story of the Hope and its defence?
We wrought in a narrow circle; it was hither and thither and thence;
To the walls, and back for a little; to the fort and there to abide,
Grey-beards and boys and women; they lived there—and they died;
Nor counted much in the story. I have heard it told since then,
And mere lies our deeds have turned to in the mouths of happy men,
And e'en those will be soon forgotten as the world wends on its way,
Too busy for truth or kindness. Yet my soul is seeing the day
When those who are now but children the new generation shall be,
And e'en in our land of commerce and the workshop over the sea,
Amid them shall spring up the story; yea the very breath of the air
To the yearning hearts of the workers true tale of it all shall bear.
Year after year shall men meet with the red flag over head,
And shall call on the help of the vanquished and the kindness of the dead.
And time that weareth most things, and the years that overgrow
The tale of the fools triumphant, yet clearer and clearer shall show
The deeds of the helpers of menfolk to every age and clime,
The deeds of the cursed and the conquered that were wise before their time.

Of these were my wife and my friend; there they ended their wayfaring
Like the generations before them thick thronging as leaves of the spring,
Fast falling as leaves of the autumn as the ancient singer hath said,
And each one with a love and a story. Ah the grief of the early dead!

"What is all this talk?" you are saying; "Why all this long delay?"
Yes, indeed, it is hard in the telling. Of things too grievous to say
I would be, but cannot be, silent. Well, I hurry on to the end—
For it drew to the latter ending of the hope that we helped to defend.
The forts were gone and the foemen drew near to the thin-manned wall
And it wanted not many hours to the last hour and the fall,
And we lived amid the bullets and seldom went away
To what as yet were the streets by night-tide or by day.
We three, we fought together, and I did the best I could,
Too busy to think of the ending; but Arthur was better than good;
Resourceful, keen and eager, from post to post he ran,
To thrust out aught that was moving and bring up the uttermost man.
He was gone on some such errand, and was absent a little space,
When I turned about for a moment and saw my wife's fair face,
And her foot set firm on the rampart, as she hastened here and there,
To some of our wounded comrades such help as she could to bear.
Then straight she looked upon me with such lovely, friendly eyes
Of the days gone by and remembered, that up from my heart 'gan rise
The choking sobbing passion; but I kept it aback, and smiled,
And waved my hand aloft—But therewith her face turned wild
In a moment of time, and she stared along the length of the wall,
And I saw a man who was running and crouching, stagger and fall,
And knew it for Arthur at once; but voiceless toward him she ran,
I with her, crying aloud. But or ever we reached the man,
Lo! a roar and a crash around us and my sick brain whirling around,
And a white light turning to black, and no sky and no air and no ground,
And then what I needs must tell of as a great blank; but indeed
No words to tell of its horror hath language for my need:
As a map is to a picture, so is all that my words can say.

But when I came to myself, in a friend's house sick I lay
Amid strange blended noises, and my own mind wandering there;
Delirium in me indeed and around me everywhere.

That passed, and all things grew calmer, I with them: all the stress
That the last three months had been on me now sank to helplessness.
I bettered, and then they told me the tale of what had betid;
And first, that under the name of a friend of theirs I was hid,
Who was slain by mere misadventure, and was English as was I,
And no rebel, and had due papers wherewith I might well slip by
When I was somewhat better. Then I knew, though they had not told,
How all was fallen together, and my heart grew sick and cold.
And yet indeed thenceforward I strove my life to live,
That e'en as I was and so hapless I yet might live to strive.
It was but few words they told me of that murder great and grim,
And how with the blood of the guiltless the city's streets did swim,
And of other horrors they told not, except in a word or two,
When they told of their scheme to save me from the hands of the villainous crew,
Whereby I guessed what was happening in the main without detail.
And so at last it came to their telling the other tale
Of my wife and my friend; though that also methought I knew too well.
Well, they said that I had been wounded by the fragment of a shell,
Another of which had slain her outright, as forth she ran
Toward Arthur struck by a bullet. She never touched the man
Alive and she also alive; but thereafter as they lay
Both dead on one litter together, then folk who knew not us,
But were moved by seeing the twain so fair and so piteous,
Took them for husband and wife who were fated there to die
Or, it may be lover and lover indeed—but what know I?

Well, you know that I 'scaped from Paris, and crossed the narrow sea,
And made my way to the country where we twain were wont to be,
And that is the last and the latest of the tale I have to tell.
I came not here to be bidding my happiness farewell,
And to nurse my grief and to win me the gain of a wounded life,
That because of the bygone sorrow may hide away from the strife.
I came to look to my son, and myself to get stout and strong,
That two men there might be hereafter to battle against the wrong;
And I cling to the love of the past and the love of the day to be,
And the present, it is but the building of the man to be strong in me.

NO MASTER

SAITH man to man, We've heard and known
That we no master need
To live upon this earth, our own,
In fair and manly deed.
The grief of slaves long passed away
For us hath forged the chain,
Till now each worker's patient day
Builds up the House of Pain.

And we, shall we too, crouch and quail,
Ashamed, afraid of strife,
And lest our lives untimely fail
Embrace the Death in Life?
Nay, cry aloud, and have no fear,
We few against the world;
Awake, arise! the hope we bear
Against the curse is hurled.

It grows and grows—are we the same,
The feeble band, the few?
Or what are these with eyes aflame,
And hands to deal and do?
This is the host that bears the word,
"No Master high or low"—
A lightning flame, a shearing sword,
A storm to overthrow.

THE MARCH OF THE WORKERS

WHAT is this, the sound and rumour? What is this that all men hear,
Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near,
Like the rolling on of ocean in the eventide of fear?
'Tis the people marching on.

Whither go they, and whence come they? What are these of whom ye tell?
In what country are they dwelling 'twixt the gates of heaven and hell?
Are they mine or thine for money? Will they serve a master well?
Still the rumour's marching on.

Hark the rolling of the thunder!
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder
Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,
And the host comes marching on.

Forth they come from grief and torment; on they wend toward health and mirth,
All the wide world is their dwelling, every corner of the earth.
Buy them, sell them for thy service! Try the bargain what 'tis worth,
For the days are marching on.

These are they who build thy houses, weave thy raiment, win thy wheat,
Smooth the rugged, fill the barren, turn the bitter into sweet,
All for thee this day—and ever. What reward for them is meet
Till the host comes marching on?

Hark the rolling of the thunder!
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder
Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,
And the host comes marching on.

Many a hundred years passed over have they laboured deaf and blind;
Never tidings reached their sorrow, never hope their toil might find.
Now at last they've heard and hear it, and the cry comes down the wind,
And their feet are marching on.

O ye rich men hear and tremble! for with words the sound is rife:
"Once for you and death we laboured; changed henceforward is the strife.
We are men, and we shall battle for the world of men and life;
And our host is marching on."

Hark the rolling of the thunder!
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder
Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,
And the host comes marching on.

"Is it war, then? Will ye perish as the dry wood in the fire?
Is it peace? Then be ye of us, let your hope be our desire.
Come and live! for life awaketh, and the world shall never tire;
And hope is marching on."

"On we march then, we the workers, and the rumour that ye hear
Is the blended sound of battle and deliv'rance drawing near;
For the hope of every creature is the banner that we bear,
And the world is marching on."

Hark the rolling of the thunder!
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder
Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,
And the host comes marching on.

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN

COME, comrades, come, your glasses clink;
Up with your hands a health to drink,
The health of all that workers be,
In every land, on every sea.
And he that will this health deny,
Down among the dead men, down among the dead men,
Down, down, down, down,
Down among the dead men let him lie!

Well done! now drink another toast,
And pledge the gath'ring of the host,
The people armed in brain and hand,
To claim their rights in every land.
And he that will, etc.

There's liquor left; come, let's be kind,
And drink the rich a better mind,
That when we knock upon the door,
They may be off and say no more.
And he that will, etc.

Now, comrades, let the glass blush red,
Drink we the unforgotten dead
That did their deeds and went away,
Before the bright sun brought the day.
And he that will, etc.

The Day? Ah, friends, late grows the night;
Drink to the glimmering spark of light,
The herald of the joy to be,
The battle-torch of thee and me!
And he that will, etc.

Take yet another cup in hand
And drink in hope our little band;
Drink strife in hope while lasteth breath,
And brotherhood in life and death;
And he that will, etc.

MAY DAY

THE WORKERS.

O EARTH, once again cometh Spring to deliver
Thy winter-worn heart, O thou friend of the Sun;
Fair blossom the meadows from river to river
And the birds sing their triumph o'er winter undone.

O Earth, how a-toiling thou singest thy labour
And upholdest the flower-crowned cup of thy bliss,
As when in the feast-tide drinks neighbour to neighbour
And all words are gleeful, and nought is amiss.

But we, we, O Mother, through long generations,
We have toiled and been fruitful, but never with thee
Might we raise up our bowed heads and cry to the nations
To look on our beauty, and hearken our glee.

Unlovely of aspect, heart-sick and a-weary
On the season's fair pageant all dim-eyed we gaze;
Of thy fairness we fashion a prison-house dreary
And in sorrow wear over each day of our days.

THE EARTH.

O children! O toilers, what foemen beleaguer
The House I have built you, the Home I have won?
Full great are my gifts, and my hands are all eager
To fill every heart with the deeds I have done.

THE WORKERS.

The foemen are born of thy body, O Mother,
In our shape are they shapen, their voice is the same;
And the thought of their hearts is as ours and no other;
It is they of our own house that bring us to shame.

THE EARTH.

Are ye few? Are they many? What words have ye spoken
To bid your own brethren remember the Earth?
What deeds have ye done that the bonds should be broken,
And men dwell together in good-will and mirth?

THE WORKERS.

They are few, we are many: and yet, O our Mother,
Many years were we wordless and nought was our deed,
But now the word flitteth from brother to brother:
We have furrowed the acres and scattered the seed.

THE EARTH.

Win on then unyielding, through fair and foul weather,
And pass not a day that your deed shall avail.
And in hope every spring-tide come gather together
That unto the Earth ye may tell all your tale.

Then this shall I promise, that I am abiding
The day of your triumph, the ending of gloom,
And no wealth that ye will then my hand shall be hiding
And the tears of the spring into roses shall bloom.

MAY DAY, 1894

GLAD is the year in all her best,
The land is sweet and sheen;
Now spring with summer at her breast,
Goes down the meadows green.

Here are we met to welcome in
The young abounding year,
To praise what she would have us win
Ere winter draweth near.

For surely all is not in vain,
This gallant show she brings;
But seal of hope and sign of gain,
Beareth this spring of springs.

No longer now the seasons wear
Dull, without any tale
Of how the chain the toilers bear
Is growing thin and frail.

But hope of plenty and good will
Flies forth from land to land,
Nor any now the voice can still
That crieth on the hand.

A little while shall spring come back
And find the Ancient Home
Yet marred by foolish waste and lack,
And most enthralled by some.

A little while, and then at last
Shall the greetings of the year
Be blent with wonder of the past
And all the griefs that were.

May Day,
1894

A little while, and they that meet
The living year to praise,
Shall be to them as music sweet
That grief of bye-gone days.

So be we merry to our best,
Now the land is sweet and sheen,
And Spring with Summer at her breast
Goes down the meadows green.

FOR THE BED AT KELMSCOTT

THE wind's on the wold
And the night is a-cold,
And Thames runs chill
Twixt mead and hill,
But kind and dear
Is the old house here,
And my heart is warm
Midst winter's harm.
Rest, then and rest,
And think of the best
Twixt summer and spring
When all birds sing
In the town of the tree,
And ye lie in me
And scarce dare move
Lest earth and its love
Should fade away
Ere the full of the day.

I am old and have seen
Many things that have been,
Both grief and peace,
And wane and increase.
No tale I tell
Of ill or well,
But this I say,
Night treadeth on day,
And for worst and best
Right good is rest.

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